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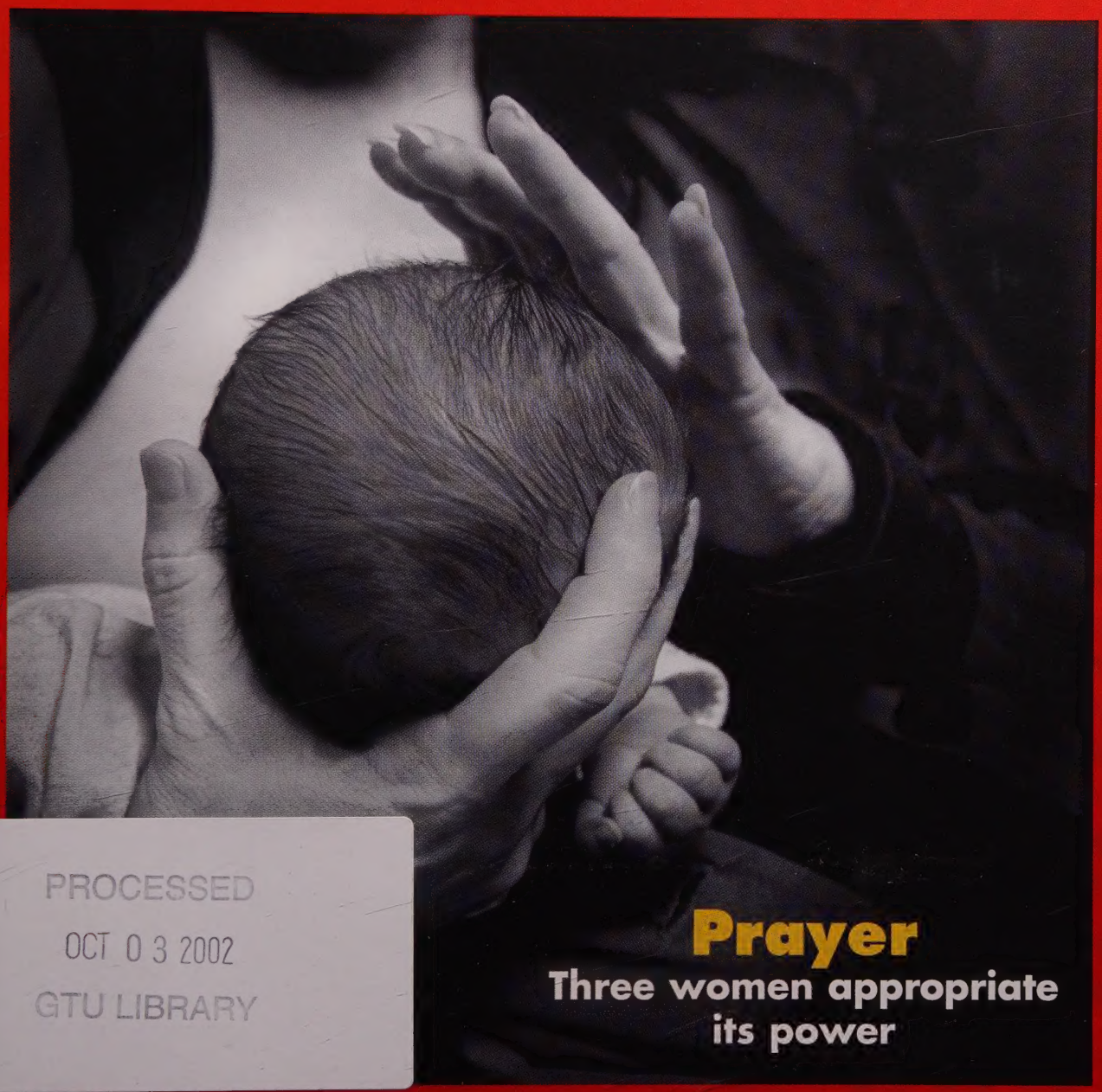
the independent Jewish women's magazine



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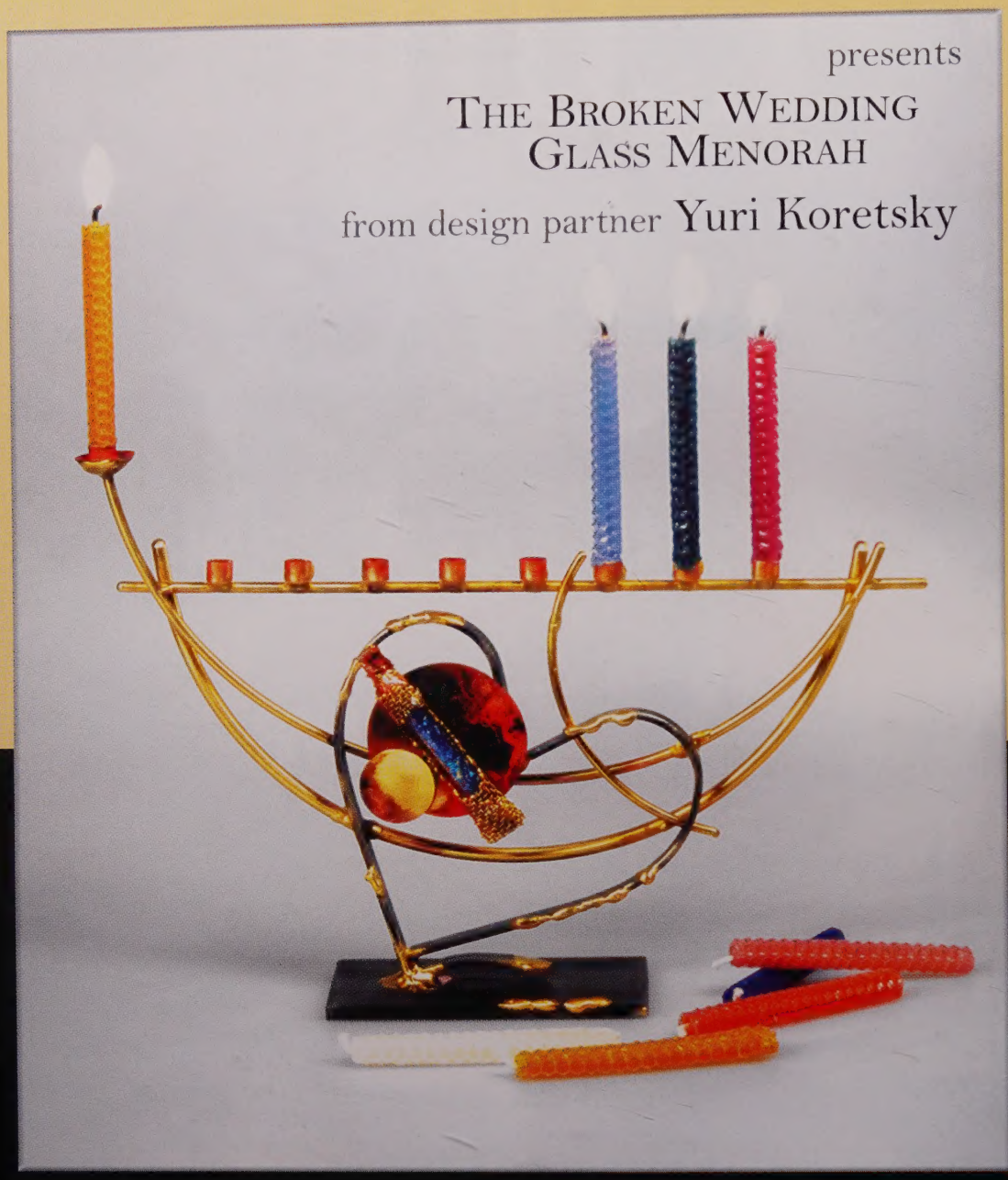

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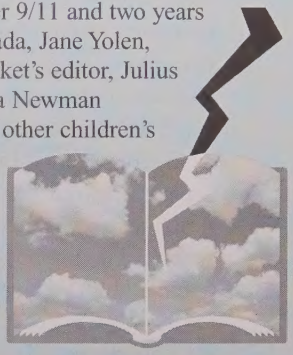

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Cover photograph by Lloyd Wolf of Susan Dmitri Lipczenko and Hayden, from the book Jewish Mothers: Strength Wisdom Compassion *(Chronicle Books). For more information visit the website: www.lloydwolf.com*

Why is this magazine called Lilith?
In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
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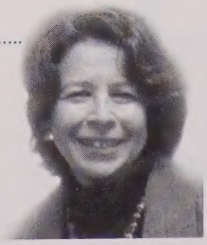

The powerful personal prayer experiences we feature in this issue are, in some ways, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a leap a forward for a woman to recognize that her own life—and body—may be an appropriate text for prayer, and that we women are able to create and own such an embodied connection to Judaism. After all, brit milah—ritual circumcision—has been the test of true Jewish identity and affiliation for millennia. It's so embedded in the Jewish experience that many of the daily prayers—including the blessing after a meal—refer to "the mark upon my body." Well, women have not had that mark. We're at a watershed moment when women are creating what amounts to personal worship experiences based on our own bodies. In the pages to come you'll read about how one woman uses the placenta which once connected her to her baby as the trigger for a ritual marking the child's separation from her body. Another woman describes nursing her baby in synagogue and feeling the holiness of nurturing life in another human being—as God does.

So what is the downside to these very moving stories of women seizing a ritual opportunity in a private fashion? Only that for so many centuries women have been told that personal prayers were where we should keep our Jewish connection—that we didn't need communal ritual, communal prayer, that we were exempt from time-bound commandments because we were too busy raising children, that we weren't obligated to appear at services. For the prayer experiences featured here, their very personal nature is part of their power, but the risk we run is that women's religious drive will be once again private, like the private petitionary prayers—*techinot*—that women through the centuries crafted and recited in solitude, often in crisis. These prayers never made it into the liturgy. As Rabbi Sandy Sasso has said, we look forward to the day when women's prayers will be bound in hard covers in a book that, should it fall, we'd kiss it as we picked it up.

On the other hand (third hand? fourth hand? How many are we up to here?) the deep spiritual component of some of our personal rituals is the very fact that we perform them alone, that they have some transcendent meaning which does not require that we perform them in public, or necessarily share them with others. A prayer of intention for beginning a new project—like starting to write a new book, for instance. We all have those moments when we're suddenly aware of the sacredness of a task we're about to begin. (It happened to me when I sat down at my desk to type the opening chapter of my first book, *Jewish and Female*). More humbly, I think of my recipe box (actually two of them) as an altar of sorts. I am perfectly serious. I don't go to them every day (having long, long ago given up cooking regularly from recipes), but when I do, especially around the holidays, I recognize that I am in a force field of memory and passionate connection. I only wish that I had a prayer to say for those moments, The Bracha of the Recipe Box, a prayer of gratitude for the people in my life (and the stages in my life) these food-stained cards and slips of paper represent. They're a crib sheet to personal history, and a way to memorialize both people who are no longer alive (better even than a yahrzeit candle) and people no longer in my life.

Some are the recipes which break my heart, heartbreaking because they're in the handwriting of people dear and dead: the recipe for my mother's matzah balls, written in part in my father's distinctive handwriting, and the 1950s and 60s specialties of my mother's that I would not want to replicate now, but which I keep anyway, because she wrote them out. (One, which I never saw emerging from her oven, was for komish bread—the north-end-of-Winnipeg version of mandel bread—made with Special K cereal!! What on earth could that have been? So the recipe box has a few unsolvable mysteries. Including why my mother wrote out for me a recipe from a woman who was her rival....) There's a recipe for a wonderful carrot ring from a late cousin, a recipe I haven't made in decades, but cherish anyway. At age six I'd been the flower girl at her wedding, and she died young. Cookie specialties—oatmeal and poppyseed—from two of my father's sisters, long lived. My cousin Sheila made a whole bar mitzvah meal from these recipes, and placed a recipe card beside each one on the buffet, thus inviting into the celebration all the dear deceased relatives from the female line; since the photos of family members in the synagogue lobby were all of grandfathers and uncles, she let the guests know that the grandmas and aunts needed a place of honor too. In the same spirit, I have (and cook from) my late mother-in-law's divine recipe for cabbage soup. (Urgent question: Why am I the repository of recipes from my husband's family? How come he has no recipe box, though he cooks?)

Recipe cards — a crib sheet to personal history, even a spur to personal prayers.

Then there are random exotica which bring pure pleasure, untinctured with regret: Labor-intensive Sephardic goodies from when my oldest child made a good buddy in nursery school; his mom is in my life still. Recipes for Rosh Hashanah feasts culled from the tiny Jewish community in South Dakota, where I once spent a year on an Indian reservation. And an extraordinarily good Passover apple cake from the mother of Yehudi Menuhin; story goes that when Menuhin was still a child prodigy (must have been in the 1930s), Mama accompanied him on a concert tour which brought them to Winnipeg at Pesach. They stayed with a family friend, Mrs. Menuhin baked the cake, and the recipe remains in my box as proof that Winnipeg was a center of high culture evening the olden days. The handwritten recipes

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for her mother's specialties sent to me by my oldest childhood friend; her script looks exactly as it did in grade school, a fact which beings me great joy. Some of the stitches in life have not been dropped.

And then there are the things in these boxes which aren't recipes, further evidence that this is a shrine—not to kitchen gods but to the past: Babysitter lists from the 1970s, kept here because I don't want to forget the names of these estimable teenaged girls who now, for heaven's sake, must be in their 40s! Driving directions in my late father-in-law's hand, because he knew I'd get lost without them. Instructions, yellowing with age, for making pomander balls, cottage cheese from scratch, sprouts from mung beans, all testifying that once, before writing books, editing copy and raising money came to preclude such pursuits, I'd had more time. Each time I see these mementos, I pause for a moment in silent and solitary acknowledgement that I've led many lives, and that each phase, each city, each circle of friends, has left me with something of value.

So my private rituals are at the stove and in the kitchen—not in shul, not even in study. I give thanks to antecedents, and recognize that even if I didn't always appreciate their influence fully at the time, their reification in my recipe boxes testifies to their hold on me. I suppose my prayer would go something like: "Help me to acknowledge the present moment, and the ones who share it with me."

And let us hope that the coming year will bring better news.

Susan

—SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

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—from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, *23a-b*

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Kol Ishah:
The Voices of Women.

Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own **strong voices.**

Centennial: Regina Jonas The First Woman Rabbi

Regina Jonas was born 100 years ago to an Orthodox family in Berlin's worst slum. How did she come, 30 years later, still an Orthodox Jew, to be studying for ordination as the first woman rabbi? Elisa Klapheck, editor of Berlin's Jewish monthly, has published a biography of Jonas which answers the question (*Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: Kann die Frau das rabbinische Amt bekleiden?).*

Even as a little girl, Regina told her friends that when she grew up she was going to be a rabbi. The 1920s and 1930s were a high point of European feminism, when women entered fields formerly closed to them. Regina was first certified as a teacher, and financed her further education by teaching Hebrew and religion. She began to study at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, and began lecturing around 1924. One of her themes was that the "Jewishly lonely" soul could find its way back into Judaism through symbols—seeing a *lulav* or hearing a *shofar*.

Jonas insisted that at the end of her studies she would take the rabbinical exam. She took all required exams and submitted two lengthy dissertations—a Biblical one on Rashi, and a halakhic one on the issue of a woman's fitness to "clothe" the office of rabbi. Then her teacher died unexpectedly, and his successor categorically refused to ordain a woman.

However, Leo Baeck, who presided over the Orthodox rabbinate, did give her a certificate to preach, which she did in various parts of the country during the early 1930s. She also taught at girls' high schools, and produced an annual Hanukkah play she wrote, which stressed the roles of powerful women such as Hannah, Esther, and Deborah.

Before the Nazis came to power, Jonas was referred to in sarcastic terms by the Jewish press and the Jewish community. Beginning in 1933, ironically, her role expanded as Jewish schools had to admit an overflow of Jewish children, who were no longer permitted in public schools. And in outlying places where the rabbis had either fled the country or been arrested or murdered, there was great need for preachers offering hope and strength to the remaining Jews.

In 1935, Rabbi Max Dienemann declared that he was ready to give Jonas the oral exam leading to rabbinical ordination. He tested her and certified in the official document that she could treat the pros and cons of religious issues. He declared her fit to be a rabbi.

Professor Harry Torczyner, who had taught her Bible, wrote from Jerusalem: "Thank God, I don't have to tackle such delicate halakhic problems as that which you put before us all those years: may a woman be a rabbi. Now you are."

Jonas, who was Orthodox, never had a pulpit of her own. While she found support from a liberal faction within the Berlin Jewish community, others referred to her mockingly as "Miss Rabbi." However, in 1936 the community gave Jonas a job taking care of the souls of patients in hospitals and homes for the aged. She tried to get permission to minister to incarcerated women. And as more and more rabbis were arrested, murdered, or driven from the country, she was finally given the opportunity to preach. Her steady theme was the mission of the Jewish people: no matter what others did, Jews had been sent into the world to teach pure love of God. The difficulties of the times were to be viewed as tests of Jewish virtue and steadfastness.

Jonas rejected all suggestions that she try to flee. Instead, she cared for her poor people (sometimes writing to their relatives abroad on their behalf), studied weekly with Max Weyl, and taught young girls in her home.

Then, in 1939, she fell in love with a retired Reform rabbi, Joseph Norden of Hamburg, 32 years her senior. The two friends, platonic or otherwise, spent time together in Norden's Hamburg apartment. He was sent to Theresienstadt in 1942, a few months before Jonas was.

Jonas arrived in the camp with her mother, only to be snubbed by the Chief Rabbi, who would not acknowledge her ordination. Nevertheless, she gave at least 27 lectures to the prisoners. In 1944, she and her mother were taken to Auschwitz, where both perished.

A century after her birth, this pioneer's influence remains. In 1999, the first conference of European women rabbis, cantors, and other scholars was dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Regina Jonas.

—HENNY WENKART

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Ending Abuse in Bukharian Jewish Families

Bukharian-Jewish women in Queens, New York, have started a grass-roots group, Beit Shalom, to combat domestic violence, a pervasive problem among immigrants who began arriving in the States from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan about 10 years ago, after the breakup of the former Soviet Union. Their community in Queens now numbers some 60,000. With support from the New York Women's Foundation, Beit Shalom offers workshops and lectures by mental health professionals on such topics as violence while dating and the impact of family abuse on children and teenagers.

When asked what made the Bukharian community particularly vulnerable to this scourge, **Renee Banerjee**, Program Director of the New York Women's Foundation, cited problems specific to immigrants, such as language and cultural barriers, that cause stress in families. In New York, she said, the sex roles of this traditional culture have been turned upside down.

"The women have to work. And the men seem to have a harder time finding jobs than their wives." Banerjee also said that the rabbis were still enforcing a very male-dominating ethos.

At first, when people heard about Beit Shalom, said **Rita Kluyov**, executive director, "they wouldn't come to the programs. Up to now, nobody talked about abuse, which happens a lot in our community, and includes physical, financial, and verbal," Kluyov said. "In the Bukharian community, there is only your family. But now, I'm telling you, it's a big change." The average lecture now draws more than 200 people, and the Shalom Task Force Hot Line, a crisis hotline founded by Orthodox women, now has a Bukharian-speaking volunteer.

Except for Kluyov and a secretary, Beit Shalom, located in a small office in Kew Gardens Hills, is run entirely by women volunteers, who presently number 22. "They are trying to build women leaders in the community," Banerjee said. "They're thinking big, to build public awareness that domestic violence is a bad thing."

For further information about Beit Shalom, call 718-575-1445.

—ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

What Jewish College Students *Really* Think about Gender Roles

A just-released study on America's Jewish college freshmen holds some surprises not covered in the accompanying press release. Among other things, the Hillel-sponsored study reveals that raising a family now ranks as these students' most important life goal. (In a 1977 survey, raising a family ranked third.) Nearly half of the students reported that their mothers have earned a graduate degree, compared with less than 15 per cent of the mothers of non-Jewish students. In addition, the survey reveals a sharp decline in the percentage of students, both Jewish and non-Jewish, with stay-at-home mothers: nearly half of all mothers in 1971, compared to today's only 8.9 percent of Jewish mothers and 11.4 percent of non-Jewish.

All of which seems to indicate that we've made progress towards integrating the sometimes seemingly incompatible goals of Jewish continuity with women's equality. But not so fast. Despite the large number of Jewish families with working mothers, the study also reveals that *over 19 percent* of Jewish students believe that the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.

—MARGOT KAMINSKI

Just in time for the holidays

Jewish Women Watching has struck again. This time, the underground group that monitors sexism in the Jewish establishment is demanding that Jewish life be affordable to all. In May, a mailing went out to thousands of Jewish community leaders with the quote: "I grew up thinking Jews should work in social change, but only investment bankers can afford a Jewish life." This latest JWW campaign is in response to a recent study by the American Jewish Committee, which documents the prohibitive costs of such basics as synagogue memberships, Jewish day schools and summer camps.

Not to gloat or anything, but...

Remember far-right radio personality **Laura Schlessinger**, the self-appointed arbiter of morals who sported a Magen David around her neck? [See LILITH cover story, Summer 2000.] Thanks to StopDrLaura.com, an online campaign that shone the spotlight on her hateful homophobic rantings, her television program sank like a stone. And StopDrLaura.com won two "Golden Dot" awards this past April. George Washington University and the Democracy Project confer this biennial award upon organizations or individuals who best use the Internet to influence public opinion or policy.

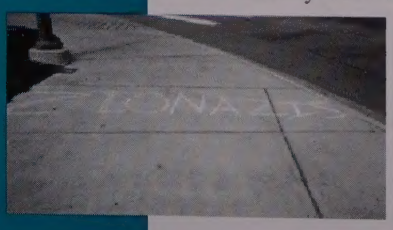
kol ishah

Lilith Notes the Passing of:

Eppie Lederer, a.k.a. **Ann Landers**, 83, in June. Born in Sioux City, Iowa to Russian-Jewish immigrants, Landers, the Chicago housewife married to an affluent businessman, reinvented herself in the '50s as the smart-mouthed columnist whose syndicated bons mots of advice ultimately reached nearly 90 million readers a day.

Actress **Zypora Spaisman**, 86, who for 50 years acted in and did just about everything else in the Folksbiene Yiddish theatre company in New York. Born in Poland, Spaisman, who was a midwife as a young woman, produced and played in 43 consecutive productions at Folksbiene. Peretz Hirschbein's "Green Fields," which she produced at the Educational Alliance on the Lower East Side in 2000, was her last play.

Palestinians and their supporters screamed at the Jewish students: "Hitler did not finish the job."



Virulent anti-Semitism at Colorado State U.

Anti-Semitism on Campus ...in the U.S.

• From San Francisco, **Laurie Zoloth** sent out an email message in May to San Francisco State University faculty and administrators which was quickly circulated around the world. Zoloth wrote, in part:

> After nearly 7 years as director of Jewish Studies, and after nearly two decades of life here as a student, faculty member and wife of the Hillel rabbi, after years of patient work and difficult civic discourse, I am saddened to see SFSU return to its notoriety as a place that teaches anti-Semitism, hatred for America, and hatred, above all else, for the Jewish State of Israel…I cannot fully express what it feels like to have to walk across campus daily, past maps of the Middle East that do not include Israel, past posters of cans of soup with labels on them of drops of blood and dead babies, labeled "canned Palestinian children meat, slaughtered according to Jewish rites under American license," past poster after poster calling out "Zionism=racism, and Jews=Nazis." This is not civic discourse, this is not free speech, this is the Weimar Republic with brown shirts it cannot control. This is the casual introduction of the medieval blood libel and virulent hatred smeared around our campus in a manner so ordinary that it hardly excites concern—except if you are a Jew, and you understand that hateful words have always led to hateful deeds.
>
> Yesterday, the hatred coalesced in a hate mob. Yesterday's Peace in The Middle East Rally was completely organized by the Hillel students, mostly 18 and 19 years old. They spoke about their lives at SFSU and of their support for Israel, and they sang of peace. They wore new Hillel t-shirts that said "peace" in English, Hebrew and Arabic. A Russian immigrant, in his new English, spoke of loving his new country, a haven from anti-Semitism. A sophomore spoke about being here only one year, and about the support and community she found at the Hillel House. Both spoke of how hard it was to live as a Jew on this campus how isolating, how terrifying. A surfer guy spoke of his love of Jesus and his support for Israel, and a young freshman earnestly asked for a moment of silence, and all the Jews stood still, listening as the shouted hate of the counter demonstrators filled the air with abuse.
>
> As soon as the community supporters left, the 50 students who remained… were surrounded by a large, angry crowd of Palestinians and their supporters. But they were not calling for peace. They screamed at us to "go back to Russia" and they screamed that they would kill us all, and other terrible things. They surrounded the praying students, and the elderly women who are our elder college participants, who survived the Shoah, who helped shape the Bay Area peace movement, only to watch as a threatening crowd shoved the Hillel students against the wall of the plaza.…
>
> As the counter demonstrators poured into the plaza, screaming at the Jews to "Get out or we will kill you" and "Hitler did not finish the job," I turned to the police and to every administrator I could find and asked them to remove the counter demonstrators from the plaza, to maintain the separation of 100 feet that we had been promised. The police told me that they had been told not to arrest anyone, and that if they did, "it would start a riot." I told them that it already was a riot. Finally, **Fred Astren**, the Northern California Hillel Director and I went up directly to speak with **Dean Saffold**, who was watching from her post a flight above us. She told us she would call in the SF police. But the police could do nothing more than surround the Jewish students and community members who were now trapped in a corner of the plaza, grouped under the flags of Israel, while an angry, out of control mob, literally chanting for our deaths, surrounded us. Dr. Astren and I went to stand with our students. This was neither free speech nor discourse, but raw, physical assault.

• **Jenni Mangel**, associate director of Hillel at the University of California at Berkeley, told LILITH that in the past year, "the UCB campus became a difficult place to be Jewish. The Hillel building was vandalized on erev Pesach, and Hillel received a bomb threat. There were many anti-Zionist campus demonstrations. Accusations against Israel as an apartheid state, and calls for the university to divest from Israel were heard regularly on Sproul Plaza. The Jewish Student Union president, who is entering the UAHC rabbinic program, even recommended that prospective students who are not yet comfortable with their Jewish identity spend their collegiate years elsewhere."

• **Susan Weintrob**, a Jewish day-school director and former college English instructor who last June attended a conference for women historians at the University of Connecticut, said that she was taken aback at the intensity of anti-American and anti-Israel sentiments that participants there expressed. For example, Weintrob said, one female panelist criticized what she called "American feminism," advising her colleagues to instead look to Afghanistan "to see what sisterhood really is." Moreover, Weintrob recently told LILITH, colleagues have been informing her that those who not at least publicly accept pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel/Western rhetoric should not plan on receiving promotions, tenure, or friendships within their departments. Weintrob recently posted a query on a listserve asking if other academics were experiencing these disturbing trends. She received over 100 responses, from all over the world, testifying to the academic bias she'd been told about. —A.S.A.

...and in England

In England, University of Manchester professor **Mona Baker** ousted two Israeli professors from journals that she edits, on the grounds that they are Israelis. Her action followed a call for the EU to sever all academic ties with Israeli institutions, instigated by Professor **Steven Rose** of Britain's Open University and his wife **Hilary Rose**, professor at Bradford University. The University of Manchester has refused to condemn Baker's action.

•An American-Jewish student **Hila Ratzabi** arrived in England for a semester abroad in January 2002, she was not prepared for the anti-Semitism that she encountered. She writes:

> First off was the cover of the left-leaning New Statesman magazine emblazoned with the words: "A Kosher Conspiracy?" over an image of a Jewish star, its lower point stabbing a British flag. The article, which criticized Israeli policy, generated an angry response from the British-Jewish community. The magazine later apologized for its offensive cover, admitting that it was inappropriate, as the intent was to criticize Israel's political choices and not Judaism.
>
> On campus, at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, I avoided political discussions about the Middle East; I just felt I hadn't educated myself enough about the topic. But I soon discovered that many British students who did choose to flaunt their opinions to me about the Israeli/Palestinian situation were completely ignorant. One evening, for example, as I was having dinner at my friend's flat, my being Jewish arose in conversation. One of her flat-mates, a 26-year-old student, asked: "Weren't Jews moneylenders in Europe, or something?" When current Mideast politics inevitably entered the conversation, he tried to defend the terrorist attacks against Israel because, he said, the Palestinians were "desperate." In the center of campus, where students sit to drink and socialize, someone had written in big, colorful chalk letters: "Palestinian Resistance Is Not Terrorism."
>
> Another student told me that one day her film class was shown a Jean Renoir film called "This Land is Mine," about a group of teachers in a French provincial town who resisted the Nazis. The professor, a guest lecturer for the day, commented off-handedly that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory today was comparable to the Nazi occupation in France. No one in the class reacted.
>
> I know that I have a lot to learn. But in England I realized that intellectual modesty should not stop us from dispelling clearly prejudiced sentiments.

kol ishah

Jews of Many Colors

The idea for **Kol Echad**, a new Jewish multiracial children's choir, came from **Vivian Shapiro**, a longtime activist in social justice causes such as AIDS and gay rights. The visual impact of the choir, Shapiro says, will underline the diversity of the Jewish community. Kol Echad is being funded by the Jewish Multiracial Network, a nationwide coalition of multiracial Jewish families and Jews of color. Kol Echad will be based in New York. For more information about the Jewish Multiracial Network, log onto www.jmnetwork.org

Additional resources:

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/ayecha—an organization for Jews of color

www.tawonga.org—Camp Tawonga hosts Mosaic, a weekend for Jewish multiracial and multicultural families

www.Loolwa.com—the website for the Multicultural Curriculum Project

www.yachadbshalom.com—an organization that produces online magazine Café Ami, a magazine devoted to diversity and inclusion in the community

—YOLANDA THOMAS

Food for Thought

The latest issue of **Nashim, A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues**, is dedicated to gender, food and survival. Articles include such delights as "Having Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite households," by **Carol Meyers**. Nashim@schechter.org.il

How It Happened

Two years ago, actress **Jessica Meyer,** 23, home in Washington D.C. on vacation from drama school in London, learned from an older sister that their favorite director, **Roman Polanski,** had just bought film rights to "The Pianist," by the famous Polish-Jewish pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman. The book, originally published in 1945 and recently reissued, recounts the author's story of his survival in wartime Warsaw. After reading the book, which she loved, Meyer murmured to her father that she'd like to just call up Polanski and ask him if she could play Halina, the sister of the main character.

"My dad laughed, and said, 'Yeah, Jess, I don't think that's the way it works!'" said Meyer.

When Meyer returned to London, she immediately called the production company. Turns out that Polanski likes to hire unknown young actors. Seems Meyer won't be unknown for long: three months after she made the call, she found out that she'd landed the part.

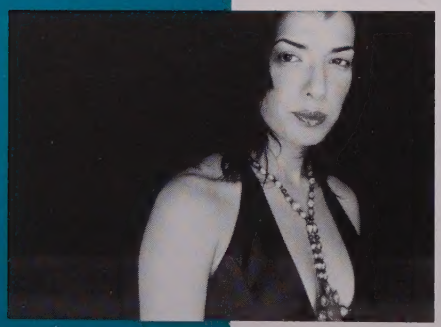
"The Pianist," which stars Adrian Brody as Szpilman, won the Palme d'Or award in Cannes this year. The film will premiere in North America this December.

Meyer, who lives in London, has already finished filming her second movie, shot in Spain.

"I felt so lucky to go from playing a Jewish girl in World War II Warsaw to an upper-class British girl with blond hair," said Meyer, referring to her role in "South of Granada," about members of the literary Bloomsbury Group. "When I was back in the States, people kept saying to me, you look too Jewish for this or that. I was afraid I'd be stuck in some ethnic box," she said, with a hint of the British accent that she worked hard at attaining in drama school.

But Meyer noted how difficult it is for her, as Jewish woman living in England, to witness the recent frequent and ugly expressions of British anti-Semitism. "As a Jew," she said, "I feel so lost here."

Jessica Meyer (far right) as Halina



Middle Eastern Diva

Dikla, a 27-year-old Israeli singer who fuses electronic sounds with Arab pop—she grew up in Beer Sheba, listening to Egyptian radio—made her North American debut this summer at Lincoln Center in New York. The sexy young woman slunk about the stage in a shimmering yellow satin gown, whipping around her abundant black hair as her voice slid up and down the scales in Middle Eastern mode, after the style of the famous Egyptian singer **Um Kultum,** one of Dikla's major influences, she says.

On the Other End of the Camera...

Producer and director **Edet Belzberg**, 32, says that making her first film, "Children Underground," about street children in Bucharest, was one of the greatest personal challenges she has ever faced. Viewers will immediately see why. The documentary, which won a special jury prize at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival and an Academy Award nomination, records with almost unbearable directness the lives of abandoned Romanian children born during the Ceausescu dictatorship, which outlawed abortion and birth control. Living in a subway station, the children spend their days sniffing paint to dull their hunger pains, begging passersby for money. They group together in gangs, which often set upon the weaker members. One particularly devastating scene in the film records the children surrounding a ten-year-old girl, whom they brutally kick. The commuters hurrying by ignore her animal-like screams.

Belzberg said that she made the wrenching decision not to intervene when she witnessed such horrific scenes because, she said, documenting what these children suffer would ultimately help all the children who live on the street.

"Children Underground" is Belzberg's first film. She is now working on "Gymnasts," about girls who competed in the 2000 Olympics.

—A.S.A

Girls Who Rock

Thanks to rock and roll camps for girls springing up around the country, more and more young women are strapping on an electric guitar and belting out their own songs, gaining the skills and confidence they need to enter this musical scene. Last summer, The Institute for Musical Arts sponsored its first such camp for girls in Goshen, Massachusetts. Fifteen girls ages 11 to 20 spent five days studying vocals, drums, stage technique, chord charting and song development, concluding with a concert where most of the songs were originals, written or arranged during the program.

Since 1987, the Institute for Musical Arts (www.ima.org) has been "supporting women in music and its related businesses." **Ann Hackler**, executive director of the IMA, says "Adolescence is such a fertile, creative, emotional time. All too often, those emotions get turned inward, sometimes in self-destructive ways. The camp helps girls channel that energy outward, to take the stage, and to say what they have to say."

For **Leah Kunkel**, teaching sessions on vocal technique provided the opportunity to be a positive role model for girls. "When I grew up, I didn't know any women who were serious musicians," says Kunkel. "If you were a girl, you were going to be asked to pick up a tambourine, shake your butt, and look cute." Kunkel credits her own development to her musical Jewish family. "Singing is a huge part of the Jewish cultural tradition, and my upbringing was enriched by that music. That's a gift that I got from my Jewish heritage, and I wanted to share it with others."

—RACHEL KRANSON

You go, girl!

B'nai B'rith Youth organization (BBYO) announced last spring that after 77 years as an agency under B'nai B'rith International, it is now self-governing. To help achieve this goal, four Jewish philanthropists last summer pledged $1,000,000. Chairing the board of BBYO is **Lynn Schusterman.**

Mazal Tov to:

Dr. Susan Solomon, senior scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Boulder, Colorado, for receiving the 2002 Women & Science Award from the Weizmann Institute in Israel. Solomon was among a team of scientists who determined the cause of the Antarctic ozone hole.

Rabbi Rachel Cowan and activist **Ronna Stamm**. Both received Women of Valor awards in June from the Jewish Fund for Justice.

Songwriter **Flory Jagoda** for a National Endowment of the Arts award. Jagoda, who was born in Sarajevo in 1923, has devoted her talents to transmitting Ladino songs, many of them about women's lives.

Esther Leah Ritz, who received the Philip E. Lerman Award for Racial Justice from the YWCA of Greater Milwaukee in recognition for her work as a community activist and advocator of justice at the local, national and international level. Ritz said modestly that this, the latest of many awards she has won, was "for no particular reason, except that's what I believe in."

Judy Bitman Wortman, the new executive vice president of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation.

Rabbi Mychal Springer, appointed associate dean at the Jewish Theological Seminary, a post she assumed in July; her specialty is pastoral care. ■

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The Mean Scene

Who are these new bad girls?

BY RACHEL BLUSTAIN

Ten minutes into their first phone conversation, Rachel Simmons, the doe-eyed, 26-year-old author of *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, had Barbara Winnick in tears.

Simmons recounted how, at age eight, a popular friend decided she just didn't like her anymore. Maybe it was because she had a lisp, or maybe because she was always the one in class to finish her work first; the friend never told Rachel just what she found so objectionable about her. But she also decided that she didn't want any of the other girls to be friends with Rachel either—and she was popular enough to convince them not to be. Her campaign of whispers and stealth bullying climaxed in a dance class at the Jewish Community Center, where Rachel's former friends fled from her in peals of laughter, while she, unable to comprehend their cruelty or perhaps simply unable to stop herself when she did, ran after them in despair.

For her part, Winnick, now literary arts director of the JCC of Greater Washington where that dance class took place, remembered the meanness she and her 5th grade friends had perpetrated against one girl they deemed not cool enough. When they kicked her out of their club, Winnick recalled, still guilty some 40 years later for her own shameful role in the pre-teen drama, the poor girl "cried and cried and cried."

So after the conversation with Simmons last winter, Winnick dried her eyes and began making plans for an event to address girls' cruelty to girls. Initially she booked a 100-seat room. Soon after, the mean girl made the cover of the February 24 *New York Times Magazine* under the headline: "Mean Girls and the New Movement to Tame Them." Calls to the JCC poured in, and 600 tickets were sold. (The overflow crowd watched the discussion in a second room, over closed-circuit TV).

The Times article focused on the author invited to be Simmons' co-panelist for the April JCC evening, Rosalind Wiseman. Wiseman's book, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence*, published at around the same time as *Odd Girl Out*, purports to guide parents through the treacherous waters of teen girls' social lives, with sections headed "The Queen Bee and Her Court," "The Torn Bystander," and—most succinct—"The Target."

Like Rachel Simmons, Ros Wiseman suffered at the hands of other girls in her teen years. She was, she writes in her book, a hanger-on in the popular crowd who was vulnerable to the

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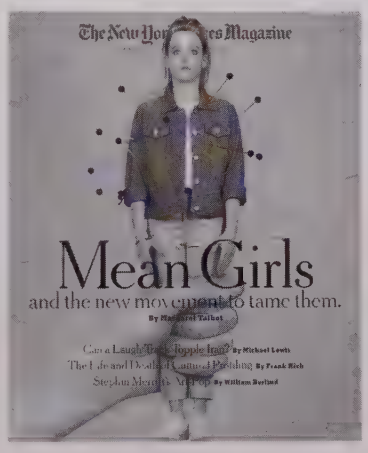
The speed with which media have responded to the mean girls phenomenon goes beyond a concern for girls' well-being. It's also the excitement of the cat-fight: pitting females against one another as sport.

abuse dished out by the "alpha" girls, and her understanding of the social life of teen girls is clearly informed by her own adolescent experiences. While Wiseman says that she works with teen girls because she likes them, she also depicts them in starkly negative terms and describes their relationships as routinely destructive and manipulative. What she likes as much as girls, it seems, is their ability to control their behavior in ways she could only dream of when she was a teen.

The Times article reveled in the shallowness and meanness of girls' social lives that Wiseman offered up. And the buzz has continued. Since then, both books have reached bestseller status, their authors appearing on national television and featured in newspapers across the country. The florid portrayals of girls' bad behavior in these books—both by outspoken Jewish women from the Washington, D.C., area—inspired a backlash article in Newsweek spotlighting kind, ethical, God-fearing girls, girls who had better things to do with their time than worry about popularity and keeping other girls in their social places.



The greatest cultural coup for the mean girls phenomenon is that it made it onto a primetime TV series, as a plot device in one of the final episodes of "Ally McBeal." Ally's teen daughter comes to live with her, and as the new girl she becomes a target for the popular girls in her school. It's a situation that could have been lifted straight off the pages of the Wiseman/Simmons books, and probably was. While the Times article made the mean girl the talk of the town, going prime time proved she'd become, at least for the moment, a cultural star.

The popularity of these books bespeaks their relevance, no doubt. But there's more going on here than just trend-spotting. The speed with which the media have responded to the mean girls phenomenon goes beyond a benign concern for girls' well-being. It's also about the excitement of the cat-fight: pitting females against one another as sport, and the books' continuing popularity, the appearance of their authors on this fall's Jewish book fair circuit, and the controversies the books have triggered have implications for girls and women in general, and for Jewish girls and women in particular.

Sophisticated betrayals

One thing is undeniable: All the writing about mean girls has hit a nerve. Being rejected by formerly close friends can feel utterly destabilizing, and memories of the trauma can stay vivid for decades. (See "Mean Girls in Training," p. 13.) While many women shrugged their shoulders and said they just must have been lucky enough to know mainly nice girls, a number of women Lilith interviewed for their professional perspectives poured out their own painful memories. They told of what they had suffered at the hands of other girls, at public school and in Jewish schools, youth groups and camps. (See "How One Jewish Camp Helps," page 14.) They were grateful that girl bullying was finally being taken seriously, not dismissed as "just something girls do."

And after a decade of sociological literature that cast girls as sad and silent, it seems healthy to say that girls not only feel ugly feelings, but that some girls act on those feelings in ways that can at times be terribly cruel. Why not say it, after all? Girls themselves do. (Members of oppressed groups often oppress each other.)

But there's also a less seemly side to the mean girl phenomenon. The authors paint all girls with broad brushstrokes, as if bullying and being bullied is something that almost all girls either do or go through. (Though the authors offer no scientific studies of the subject of girl bullying, it's an assertion that seems patently untrue.) Wiseman writes: "Cliques are sophisticated, complex, and multilayered, and every girl has a role within them." The one exception, in Wiseman's world, is "The Floater"—the girl who has friends in different groups and can move freely among them. But, Wiseman warns parents, she's a rare breed. So the conversation about cliques and bullying becomes, from the get go, a conversation about Girls with a capital G.

Once that's established, the mean girl becomes a convenient tool with which to express widespread ambivalences about girls as a breed. She's silly. After all, she judges other girls on such superficialities as what brands they wear, how they style their hair or who wears dorky shoes. But she's horribly powerful, too. In her most extreme forms, her betrayals and abandonments can devastate other girls, the authors seem to suggest, nearly as much as does sexual abuse. The mean girl is at once too aggressive—worse, in fact, than boys, because more calculating—and she's a weak go-along, too, willing to swallow our culture's rigid feminine dictates hook, line and sinker.

Girls who *are* what they *wear*

Certainly, not all is to be dismissed in the two authors' theories. The frame Wiseman offers about what motivates girls' obsession with popularity seems plausible—too many girls, upon hitting puberty, still feel constricted by what's acceptably feminine. That they're mean to each other in the name of shallow popularity also rings true.

Simmons, for her part, argues that girls, like many adult women, are too afraid of losing the people closest to them, so they try to keep their friendships conflict-free. The aggression

> The "mean girls" focus is a backlash against feminist thinking. Saying that girls are as mean as boys is a way of collapsing differences. It decontextualizes WHY girls get nasty in middle school. The robust language for envy and jealousy fades in middle school. Girls get confused—they have no way to say, "I was really upset when you went to the mall without me." In order to stay best friends you have to hide your negative feelings (even from your best friend). It's the tyranny of *kind* and *nice*.
>
> —Catherine Steiner-Adair

they feel, she claims, goes underground, only to resurface later on in uglier forms. Because they're uncomfortable with conflict, she argues, they also seek refuge in their clique, and when they're angry they'll gang up, as a group, on the odd girl out.

"Girls are socialized to be *indirect* with their aggression, and no amount of sports will cure this," she said at the JCC event in Washington. She suggested instead that a girl needs to learn how to "say what you don't like; request what you want; and affirm that the other person is a human being. We need to show kids that conflict is healthy."

These arguments, too, seem anecdotally convincing, and the two authors' theories work together well to explain why some girls feel weak and turn mean.

The real problem comes when we're faced with the depths of meanness that purportedly come from the hands of girl bullies. Then the authors' insights prove shallow, and after hundreds of pages of the authors' musings, we still don't really understand why mean girls do what they do. Most of the in-depth stories we read in their books are from victims, and it makes sense—perhaps most sense—to understand and want to help these girls first. But the excited talk and the media coverage have been about the perpetrators, about whom we know the least.

Simmons offers some convincing examples of how girls' anger, repressed, ultimately explodes. There's the story of Erin, for instance, a popular, self-involved girl who evokes jealousy and resentment in her friends. Their feelings build, though they say nothing to her, until one day they find out that another girl's boyfriend kissed her. Then they turn against her en masse. They flood her e-mail with angry messages. Some of them call her a bitch. One girl writes that it makes her sick to look at her. The group bullying goes on and on for weeks, and Erin is devastated, scarred, it seems, perhaps, permanently.

It's a nightmare scenario, but at least in this example of group bullying, the cause-and-effect explanation brings the reader (if not the victim) some relief.

But examples like this aren't really the kind of bullying perpetrated by a Queen Bee. What about when girl aggression is motivated not so much by anger but by competition? Are these acts, too, expressions of the victimization girls suffer in a sexist society? Are girl bullies so bereft of inner self-worth that they pin their identities wholly on the approval of popular boys, stopping at nothing to secure it?

Or are girl bullies just power-hungry, and using to their advantage the rules of the femininity game they've mastered well? Are they members of a privileged class of girls who have simply learned how to win? Do girls bully for all these reasons, and for deeper, more personal reasons, too? Even after reading both books, we just don't know.

Take, for instance, the story in Wiseman's book recounted by 17-year-old Hope. "When I was in junior high, there was this new girl that a bunch of guys liked. Two girls in the grade went around with a petition they made all the boys sign that said, 'I will never go out with the megawhore, Lori Shore.'" All Wiseman offers us in way of explanation of this horrifying act is a breakdown of the players—who's the Queen Bee, who's the Wannabe, who's the Messenger. We know for ourselves who's the Target, no explanation needed. But that isn't analysis of what motivates girl cruelty. It's simply proof that Wiseman has mastered the taxonomy.

How do these truly mean girls feel? We don't hear their voices or understand their motivation. Instead, we just see their breathtaking, mind-boggling cruelty.

How are *Jewish* girls doing?

Being accused of not being nice is old news. But Jewish women and girls have been especially vulnerable to accusations of not-nice-ness. The Jewish American Princess is not exactly a mean girl, but she's awfully similar. She's aggressive, materialistic and spoiled—so goes the stereotype.

Perhaps it's just happenstance that both Simmons and Wiseman are Jewish. But it hardly seems coincidental that the main girl profiled in the Times article as an example of a Queen Bee—Jessica Travis—is Jewish too. Wiseman, who offered Jessica up to the Times, makes a connection between materialism and cruelty. She told Lilith, "The girls who are the meanest are the ones who have parents who are disconnected from them. They might be hyper involved in their kids' lives, but they don't see kids for who they are, but as an extension of their own social status." It seems hard to deny this listening to Jessica's mother, who told the Times: "Not many single parents can do for their children what I have done for this one. This is a child who asked

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Mean Girls in Training: When Summer Camp Hurts

All this attention now beaming down on the "mean girls" phenomenon awakes in me horrible memories from 40-odd years ago. I was perhaps 10, in Pennsylvania at a Jewish summer camp. My bunkmates included Susan, who would later become my best friend, and two girls, Lois and Ellen, who quickly assumed tight leadership of the bunk. Their heads were constantly bent together, their hands over their mouths, as they whispered secrets to each other. I was one of two first-year campers; the rest were in their second or third years. Lois and Ellen designated me as the girl to be picked on, and everybody else quickly took their lead. I was physically mature for my age, and a bit clumsy. Everything I did was cause for everybody's criticism. When I missed the ball during a game of newcomb, Lois screeched, Aaa-lice! When I got up in the morning to urinate, I heard them hissing, Alice goes to the bathroom, every morning! My Bermuda shorts, they informed me, were "faggy," which in the pre-teen vocabulary of the time meant that the fit was too loose, an absolute no-no. I suffered quietly.

Then one day the girls surrounded me as I stood at my cot. They tried to strip my clothes off. "Ugh, I touched her," Susan said.

Up to now, my two counselors had looked the other way. But now I was crying, sobbing that the girls never stopped making fun of me. As if they didn't know.

"Alice, don't let it bother you," one of them said. She was perhaps 18. Oh right, excellent advice. The other counselor was an older woman, who, I now realize, was probably a Holocaust survivor. She didn't say anything. I began to write desperate letters to my parents, who, horrified, got in touch with the camp's owners. My parents offered to take me home. But my pride intervened. Somehow, I would stick out the season. And the head counselor, a kindly widow with two children who was, like much of the camp staff, a teacher, paid a visit to our bunk. She spoke sternly, and directly. You are not, she told the girls, to make fun of Alice. You are not to hurt her feelings.

Ellen, the bunk's co-Kommandante, then piped up: "But when Alice makes fun of me, she hurts my feelings!"

Ellen, I am happy to say, did not in any way convince the head counselor that she, too, had been a victim of capricious cruelty. Somehow I made it through the rest of the summer. Back home on Long Island, Susan and I became friends. The following summer, we two returned to camp. Lois and Ellen did not. There were several first-year campers in our bunk. One of them got picked on. Everybody participated in this sadistic game. Including me.

—ALICE ALEXIOU

for a pony and got two. I tell her this is the top of the food chain. The only place you can go from here is the royal family."

Jessica would fit the stereotype of the JAP, the Jewish American Princess of whom Lilith has written so much in the past. In contrast, the girls featured in the Newsweek cover story "Girls Just Want to Be Mean" are all middle-American Christians who, the article tells us, learned their good values in church. In fact, Jewish educators reiterate much of what the Newsweek article asserts about Christian girls—that the values embedded in the culture and the religion, if taught well, can offset the materialist culture of mainstream America. But the Jewish girl we see in the Times seems concerned first and foremost with her social standing. Among the details chosen to define her in the Times article: she plays polo, figure skates, goes for a massage once a month—and belongs to the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization.

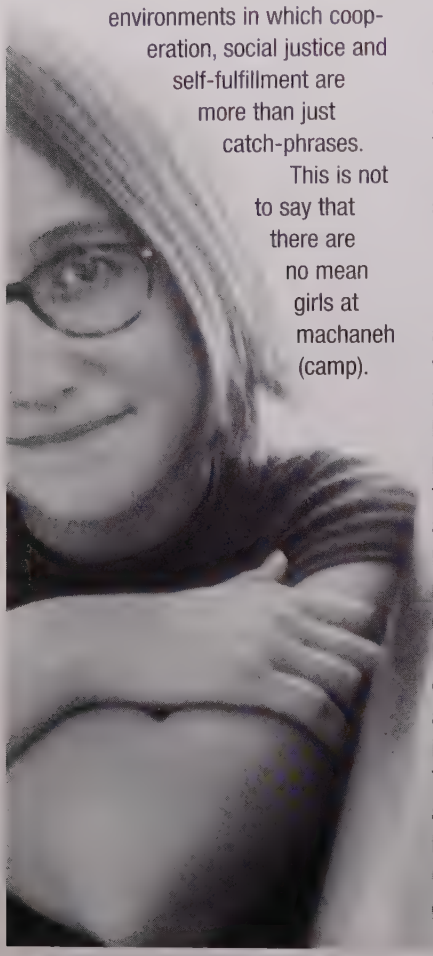
Wiseman says that the kind of materialism embodied by Jessica cuts across lines of class and race—only the markers are different; designer jeans, for instance, versus Gucci bags and shoes. Women who work with girls from low-income families, bothered by how the Times article focused on economically privileged girls, say that all girls can be just as mean and suffer just as much from social ostracism as girls from wealthy families.

But when Wiseman spoke at a large synagogue in Washington, D.C., this August, she tried to articulate a challenge to the congregation to address the materialism of the Jewish community, because, she says, those values trickle down to girls. "The same women who are doing these bat mitzvahs that up the ante every time," she said, "are the same women who are most articulate in saying that the JAP stereotype is horrible. God forbid some of the JAP stereotype was true."

There is, no doubt, a connection between the shallow materialism passed down from parents to children and girls' social cruelty—once again, a connection worthy of exploration. But when the popular press is able to cast the mean girl as a rich kid, it makes it just that much easier for us to throw our hands up at her and her cruelty. It makes it easier, too, to slap girls

How One Jewish Camp Helps

The "mean girls" issue is nothing new to Habonim-Dror, a progressive Labor-Zionist youth movement with seven summer camps across North-America. Modeled after the kibbutz system, Habonim-Dror camps are based on communal values, striving to create environments in which cooperation, social justice and self-fulfillment are more than just catch-phrases. This is not to say that there are no mean girls at machaneh (camp).



"However," says Mark Epstein, education director at Camp Na'aleh in Shohola, Pennsylvania, "We try not to gender behavior problems. The key issue is having a healthy community, and trying to help individuals to negotiate their place within it, at any age or gender." Aviva Kutnick, Camp Director, adds, "In the outside world one of the only strengths that a girl can exhibit socially is meanness… dominant females get pigeonholed into that role. We try to channel that energy into more appropriate strengths: leading shira (singing) or a sicha (discussion)."

As an entirely youth-run organization, power is shared among peers, with a *Mazkirut* (camp directorate) under the age of 25. In North-American society, where social activities are usually restricted to same-age groups, it can be a very positive experience for young people to spend extended amounts of time with older role models. *Madrikhim* are more than counselors; the word in Hebrew comes from the root *derekh,* or road. Madrikhim are there to guide the campers, not just through daily activities, but through social problems and adolescent confusion. "Gender equality has always been part of the movement's ideology," says Danya Shapiro of Camp Tavor in Three Rivers, Michigan. "Almost all of the *machanot* have "Take Back the Night," or a "Gender Night," as well as Chug Nashim, a women's issues interest group. Seeing my madrikhot (female counselors) be positive leaders, and also having them be my personal friends, had a profound effect on me."

"The media really encourages catty competition among girls," says Shoshi Goldfus, a madrikha of 5 years at Camp Galil in Buck's County, PA. "At Machaneh we have no TV, no internet, much less influence from a consumerist society telling girls to judge themselves and others based on what they own. Of course, they still have teen magazines, but we try to look at that as an opportunity for education. Madrikhim will often read those magazines with their kids and try to talk to them about what kinds of images are being absorbed. Creating that kind of social awareness helps girls to be less competitive."

If we fear that girls are using their power in negative ways, perhaps we should stop regarding this as a social ill and begin looking at it as a symptom of a larger problem—a culture where all children, female and male, suffer from the patriarchal ethos of competition. Is summer camp a "solution" to the "mean girls" phenomenon? No. But providing an environment where girls can engage in that dialogue, rather than simply be the subject of it, is a great place to start.

—ORLI COTEL

For information on Habonim-Dror programs, or for gender-issues activities, visit www.habonimdror.org

down for asserting the power they do have, even if it's just the power to oppress other girls. Jewish women know all too well the bad press we've received for not wanting to be weak.

What's in the *zeitgeist* that the "mean girl" pops up now?

Ironically, while the mean-girl portrait seems from one angle like a demonization of adolescent girls, it also grows out of the past decade's germinal feminist writings about them. Remember Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, and *Between Voice and Silence?* And Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girl*? If there's a problem with the current too-broad generalizations about the mean girl phenomenon, they may in a way be a corrective to the trend of popular psychology that had painted all adolescent girls as voiceless and weak.

But like in those earlier writings, the mean girl authors also make girls over in unsightly ways. Like in a house of mirrors, we're looking at the same girls we've always known, they're just so much uglier.

Along with her predecessors, *Queen Bees*' Wiseman asserts that by and large adolescent girls are ruled by narrow and constricting ideas of what's acceptable for females. Girls accept or reject other girls based on whether they conform to this feminine ideal. Any girl too masculine, too intellectually assertive, too sexually threatening, is in danger of ostracism. So, too, are weak girls, the ones who have to try too hard to fit in. Girls themselves are the enforcers of their own oppression, judging other girls harshly on what they wear, say and do.

The girl in the writings of the 80s and 90s, like the new, mean girl on the scene, arrived at her teen years to confront a culture that was media-saturated, over-sexualized and appearance-obsessed. In the plethora of books about eating disorders, we also saw the adolescent girl singularly obsessed with thin-

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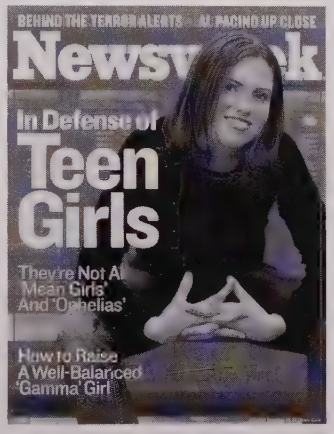
ness and beauty and keeping her body, and herself, under control. Faced with a "girl-poisoning culture," that earlier girl became self-critical, deferential and depressed. Too often, she also lost her drive to achieve, and in some cases even became suicidal. It would have been hard to imagine her having the energy or the confidence to be mean to anyone—except her parents. The only other person she was mean to was herself.

Of course, many girls in America were not failing out of school, sleeping with the first boy who propositioned them or cutting their wrists with razorblades. But others were. Concerns for the suffering of adolescent girls spurred books, lectures and sometimes even funding dollars.

Then, in the late 1990s, a backlash began. Some in the gender debates began to assert that boys were being denied their fair share of the caring and the funding. Commentators and some researchers began to claim that boys were being left out. And in 2000, conservative ideologue (and self-proclaimed feminist) Christina Hoff Sommers gave us *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men*, asserting that it was really boys who were not being provided the kind of help they needed.


BEHIND THE TERROR ALERTS
In Defense of
Teen Girls
They're Not All 'Mean Girls' And 'Ophelias'
How to Raise A Well-Balanced 'Gamma Girl'

Between the lines about boys' suffering were, of course, other messages, about girls. Some were positive—that girls were in fact stronger, more capable, better adapted than popular psychology had given them credit for. But the focus on boys was also used to suggest that feminists had secured for girls more than their fair share.

The mean girl came next, and she's a complex cultural phenomenon.

Looking at the attention to the mean girl through the rosiest lens, we could see women's willingness to hold the mean girl up for popular scrutiny as a sign that girls, and women, are strong enough to take the criticism—not as uniformly weak—without giving up the claim that girls still suffer and are worthy of special care.

But the media blitz may also be an indication that we as a society are uncomfortable with girls' power. The timing of this new demonizing of girls is interesting. It has arrived on the scene just at a time when redress for past discrimination—most notably, Title IX and gender equality in sports—is coming under attack. Is there a message that girls have already been liberated enough, and what they need now is to be controlled? (An analogy could be made to the way Black slaves were depicted as docile and happy until Reconstruction, when the image of Black men as sexual predators—the white fear always lurking near the surface—came to the fore.) Is it merely a coincidence that as women and girls gain ground in our society—for instance, girls now go to college in greater numbers than boys—they also come under attack as manipulative and deeply flawed?

Women who work with girls respond

It's not surprising, with all these ambivalences embedded in the image of the mean girl, that the books and the media coverage of her have evoked angry reactions from some feminist leaders. "The mean girls focus is a backlash against feminist thinking," says Catherine Steiner-Adair, who heads Harvard's eating disorders clinic and is an expert on teen girls' issues. Marie Wilson, the president of the Ms. Foundation, is unambiguous in her opposition. "Yes, girls can be terribly mean to each other," but what vilifying them in the popular press does, she insists, is simply give ammunition to those who claim girls have already received enough help and the sexism of our society has already been redressed.

What is surprising is that many women who work with girls say that they're happy for the press, despite their misgivings about how girls are being depicted. Any attention to girls' issues, they say, is good attention, and friendships and the ways girls treat each other, they add, is a central concern for their girls.

"Girls are sensitive—I think sensitive in a good way—and their feelings can be hurt by who's popular and who's not, and even by small things, like not being invited somewhere, so I think the fact that awareness is being raised about it is positive," says Rebekah Sweder, who runs teen programming at the Jewish Community Center of Manhattan. Girls, Sweder said, are happy for the opportunity to talk about themselves, and in particular to talk about what hurts them.

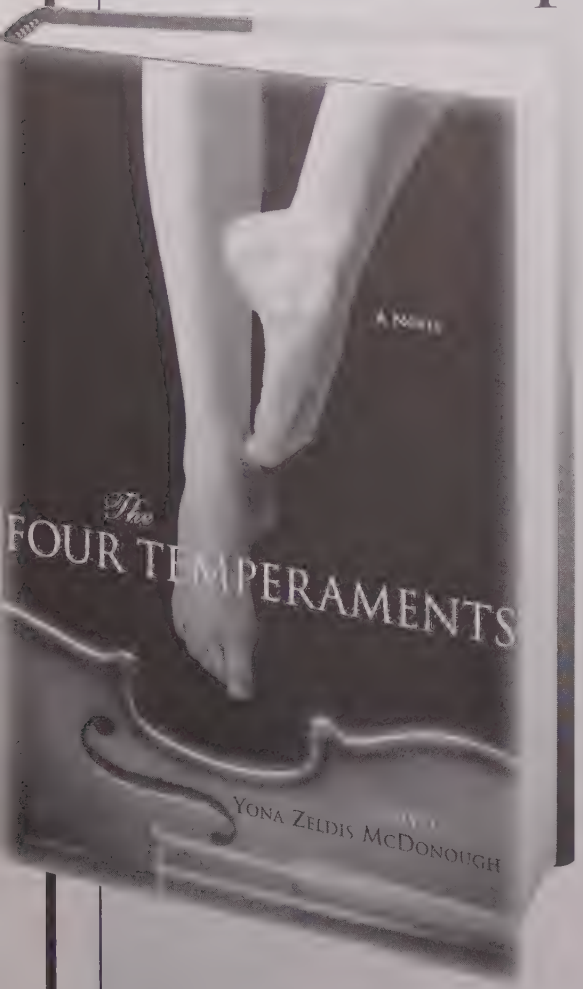
Good too, they say, is the money the attention might help them raise to work with girls. Because cultural debate aside, the goal is to continue helping girls grow stronger, happier, smarter, freer—and, indeed, nicer. In that light, adults can appreciate the clues this most recent conversation about girls offers us about girls' emotions. What is useful, hype and hysteria aside, is the sensitivity it provides to those of us who work with girls or parent girls when we try to help them navigate what can certainly at times be treacherous terrain.

Katie Riley, the program director for The Girls' Project, based on Manhattan's Lower East Side, said that in their program they already discuss why bullying and exclusion happen, role play possible responses to it, write songs and rhymes about standing up to bullies, even create fortune tellers with solutions to teasing and bullying, because it is, in fact, one of the biggest problems their girls face. It's important, she said, for girls to come up with their own solutions. But even after all that, she still finds meanness an obstinate problem.

At the end of last year, she explained, one girl who had gone through the program suddenly stopped talking to her best friend. She was clearly angry, but she wouldn't say why. And the friend who was being shut out grew angry in turn, but she wouldn't talk about it either. "I said to the girl being excluded, 'Have you done this before?' and she said, 'Yeah.' But she was unwilling to make a connection between what she was feeling and what she had done to other people.

"There's this kind of inability many girls have to imagine stepping out of it and speaking openly about how they feel. It's like the nuclear arms race of middle school. To me, the real challenge is helping the girls get to the heart of their issues."

Every PASSION
has a PRICE.



Sparks fly on every page of Yona Zeldis McDonough's white-hot novel of a father, a son, and the woman they both love.

"Blends a family saga, a love story (times two), and the narrative of an ambitious and fiery ballerina into one *delicious* whole."

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Despite her objections to the mean girl phenomenon, Catherine Steiner-Adair herself suggests that until girls learn to be direct about their negative feelings—and learn that it's okay for females to have these feelings—they will use underground maneuverings like excluding behavior to express what they think.

She notes that "the robust language for envy and jealousy fades in middle school. Girls get confused. They have no way to say 'I was really upset when you went to the mall without me.' In order to stay best friends you have to hide your negative feelings (even from your best friend)." Ironically, she explains, girl meanness grows out of "the tyranny of *kind* and *nice*."

There's truth worthy of exploration in the image of the mean girl. But needless to say, talking about all girls as if they're mean girls distorts girls in ways that make them hard to recognize by those of us who work with and raise girls and continue to like them for their sensitivity, intelligence, humor, creativity and resilience to the incredibly hard challenges many girls do face.

It distorts their social lives too, which are more complex and textured than a simple ranking on a popularity scale. "We had someone come in to talk to our seventh- and eighth- grade girls for a pilot TV show on popularity a while ago," Sweder said. "When I heard the girls talk about the social makeup of their schools, they gave me a much more heartening view. They gave me the sense that it's not all about popularity, and that groups are different in part because they have different interests. I don't really think that 'Goth' kids want to be on the football team." But in the books about mean girls, it's the rare girl who seeks out friends simply because she likes them, or for whom the quest for popularity is not all-consuming.

"The statement that struck me the most in the Times article," Sweder said, "was the one that said, 'If you ever sat in a sixth-grade lunchroom, you can't say that girls are innately good.' I hope to disagree." ■

RACHEL BLUSTAIN is a writer living in New York and a contributing editor of Foster Care Youth United.

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set to rise

BY LISA BEATMAN

Josh the bakerboy tips his popover hat to me, each day I stop by to admire his loaves and long legs, sniffing, only sniffing the flamboyant air. No change jingles in my purse to lead me into indulgences I will later regret. Like my mother, I adore good bread, and like her, I love it so much I make sure not to keep any around the house. Zaftig hips, y'know. Growing up, we kids were under the impression that all bread was cottony bland, better suited for wadding and throwing than sandwiches. Only the filling counted.

Fridays were different. Fridays Mom shut herself in the kitchen in an ecstasy of eggs and flour, birthing braided challah with more joy and less pain than she had any of us, believe you me. Not that she'd say, but you could see it in her face, transported, soon as she got home from Bea's Beauty Salon and tied the apron over her broad behind. Disdaining the cold steel of machinery, she leaned into the rising batter and kneaded it to life.

After tossing the long skeins of dough with a satisfying *thunk* on the counter, Mom danced her fingers through them, as she must have done with her own braids, right over middle, then left, then again, before they were cut at age twelve. I never had braids, hair tomboy short, but I still have hers, beribboned in their little cedar chest, salted away in the cupboard between the honey and the box of loose recipes in spidery script.

All the Singer women inherited the baking gene, as well as a passion for butter and a need to take up space in the world. Tanta Fanny—oh it was paradise those mitted hands midwifed from her own oven of iron and gas. Apfel strudels, marble pound cakes, bar cookies layered with streusel, raspberry jam and walnuts that she liberated from brown shells with the hammer Uncle Sol had left her. Bang, bang, her house shook with creation, rattling the stacked-up Lipton Tea boxes she would line with wax paper, then

M & M cookies, sent off to summer camp with us to ensure we made friends, as she had ensured that her sister would marry my father, cooking their first-date dinner, behind the scenes. Mom did make the dessert cake, piling frosting on the side that listed dangerously low. Dad married her anyway, for the promise of brisket simmered so long it fell apart on your fork.

Tanta Fanny's recipe box held more than scrips for how to stir the pot. "Miss Big-Shot Detective", was all Fanny said when I showed her the floury pages, "don't make such a mess". She sighed, fists on hips, "oh well, when you cook like me, you'll look like me". Sandwiched between yellowed Good Housekeeping cut-outs for molded Jell-O salad pasted on the leaves of a 1941 diary, were scrawled entries, *Sept. 4 rec'd telegram from Kiev, sent $5 m.o., Oct. 26 sent m.o. $10 Kiev, Dec. 18 no reply Kiev*, splotched and almost as indecipherable as Fanny's face when a young niece asked too many questions.

In those days, I was ripped-knee carefree, or was it careless? I didn't know the meaning of time. I would leave things in too long, or the pilot light unlit, then grab, unthinking, for the pan, till the scorch of flour, finger and gas hovered like a dark angel, and Fanny banished me, bandaged, from her kitchen. Fanny always took care.

The wheat flour sifting into the walls over the years made the best insulation—long ago Tanta Fanny had spit twice against the evil eye of hunger blowing into her house, or squinching in through a chink like a slack-bellied cat. Fanny had kept her vow —churning out smorgasbords of blueberry blintzes, three-cheese kugels, herring swimming in sour cream, cinnamon bubke—stuffing nieces, nephews, cousins, postmen, the ghost of her husband, then the ghosts of her brother and sisters, so many ghosts crowded around her table, Fanny gave herself over to the kitchen. You couldn't fill up a ghost, but she tried.

Decades later, I do look more like Tanta Fanny and my mother than I care to admit, though I am fighting off those wobbly jowls that were so soft to kiss. I have my own well-equipped kitchen, although Lean Cuisine entrees-for-one ride the train from freezer to microwave to couch more often than not, alongside a nice Sauvignon Blanc. I have a good life, a professional job, and I exercise, religiously, at Gold's Gym. But sometimes, on nights like this, I fantasize about working in a bakery, renouncing my stock options and svelte dreams, to reclaim those ovens, the right to eat, to make and eat the good things.

And unlike Bubbe Feiga, emaciated at the end, I would expand in proximity to the ovens, I would double in size every forty-five minutes in the intoxicating warmth, putting in what I had loved and shaped with my own hands, pushed out with my own breath. And that which I had shaped and breathed into being would grow, not bone and ash but fat and fragrant and full of resurrection, wholemeal, bee-nectar, yolks as opulent as sunsets, and the sacrificial yeast. I would stir them up in an alchemy of love, punch down the noxious gases, tipple, in the waiting, from a tumbler of achingly-sweet Manischevitz toasting *l'chaim l'chaim*, braid the loaves as Bubbe Feiga must have braided her own, follow the recipe that, somehow, escaped the burning. ■

LISA BEATMAN hits the road a lot, but calls Boston home, teaching immigrant factory workers. Her work is published in the Hawaii Pacific Review, Abiko Quarterly and Rhino. She has published a chapbook, *Ladies' Night at the Blue Hill Spa* (Bear House Publishing).

The Stay-at-Work

Mom

BY C. DEVORA HAMMER

ARTWORK BY SHERRY KARVER

At work and pregnant, I was deeply ashamed of my manifest fertility.

When I left for work this morning, there were four men taking care of the home front: my cleaner (a decorated former Israeli paratrooper); my visiting father (a mathematician, businessman and Holocaust survivor); my 2-year-old son; and my stay-at-home-husband. A friend told me that people talk about me behind my back. They envy me for finding a true balance between work and life, and for finding a New Age Man who agreed to stay at home when I took a job which meant he had to give up his. They consider us a model for the modern family.

But things are not as simple as they look.

Work is a sacrament for my father. He grew up in a poor Hungarian village and his family's tailoring business was burned down when he was young. He was told that if he studied hard he might become a teacher and earn a living that couldn't be destroyed in one night. If he studied harder, perhaps he would be admitted to the Rabbinical Seminary and avoid the draft. There were 50 places in the Seminary for Hungary's 800,000 Jews. He studied hard, but it was no salvation; he was deported to a concentration camp.

After the war, the survivors of my father's family rebuilt their business in Hungary, but when they became successful the Communists confiscated it. Then, in the revolution of 1956, they were forced to flee Hungary for Australia, leaving everything they owned behind. After each of these destructions, the family dug itself up from the rubble and devastation with single-minded brute labor. Work gave them money for food and a place to sleep. The discipline of labor provided a rhythm and purpose, healing their spirits. There was very little choice in the life of a European Jew, but you could always choose to work harder, thus rising above the degradation. "*Arbeit macht Frei!*" ("work makes you free") my father instructed me. "What a shame the Germans stole the expression!"

My sister and I grew up on the fruits of my father's labor, and were schooled in its inflexible ways. The minimum standard for him—and for us (including my Australian-born mother)—was perfection. There were no allowances made for the fact that we were living in the New World, where there was room for everyone to make a living. No one was confiscating our property or denying us jobs because we were Jewish. So despite the fact that our household became prosperous, our father's demon grew up strong inside us. I always assumed I would have to fight to earn my bread. There was no glory in work, but it was made very clear that if I didn't do it, I wouldn't survive.

I scrounged my first job in New York during a recession, and lived in perpetual fear of being on the next list of corporate layoffs. I started dating Aaron, my husband-to-be, who had spent the previous10 years in rabbinical seminaries. He had recently become the spiritual leader of a congregation that prided itself on never paying a salary. His parents maintained that the position would "lead to other things." But among the millions of words my husband and I spoke before our engagement, we never discussed his earning prospects. Perhaps because I knew that I would always work.

In the spring after we married, I became increasingly nervous about losing my job and insisted that my husband start doing something economically productive. So he decided to study social work (because he "enjoyed working with people"), but being back in school threw him into cycles of misery. He felt guilty because he had been drilled since infancy that studying Jewish law was the only activity that had any value for Jewish men; he resented me for thrusting him into this spiritual abyss by insisting he get a job; and he was frustrated because the education itself was not giving him real helping skills. "The clients they give me are hopeless!" He would cry. "I'm wasting my life away here!"

Aaron's attitude, of course, made me crazy. Where *I* come from, if you *don't* earn your bread, you are a parasite. But where *he* came from, if you didn't study sacred texts all your waking hours, you lost your place in the world-to-come. As we battled across this unbridgeable divide, I became pregnant. The recession was lifting, and, with Aaron at school and unable to support a family, I found a new job that could support the three of us, solving (though imperfectly) our marital impasse. My father's work demon emerged in full splendor. My boss was erratic and demanding, and I felt I had to prove myself to him before the baby arrived. I wrote and researched, assured my boss of his greatness and cowered under his abuses. Deeply ashamed of my manifest fertility, I drove myself beyond reason and was in a state of complete exhaustion by the time the baby came.

To my utter surprise, when the baby arrived, she bewitched me. The thought of abandoning her to go back to work left me in tears every day of my five-month maternity leave. But there was no one offering us free room and board, so I found a nanny, returned to my desk, and pumped breast milk. At this point, my husband was in class or at clinic every night, so I, after working like a fiend all day, had to rush home to relieve the nanny. I felt like a single mother. The main memory I have of this time is sitting on the kitchen floor, grabbing some still-frozen veg-

etables from the oven, my daughter ripping at my blouse, hungry for milk.

After my leave, my horrible boss left and I instantly became more valuable to the firm. One day a headhunter called to offer me a better job, and when I told my supervisor, he gave me a promotion and a 50 percent pay raise on the spot.

"They'll get back every cent—with your blood," my father warned.

"Nonsense!" I said. "No one is treated better because they are severely underpaid."

Meanwhile, Aaron's response to my good fortune was to become depressed. "Since your raise is bigger than my whole salary," he cried, "what is the point of my working?" I rolled my eyes in disbelief. I retorted, "Beginnings of careers are always difficult and maybe one day you will work your way up and be able to support *me*." I wanted him to start investing in his career.

By day I wrote memos, answered client calls, and pumped breast milk. By night I nursed. My daughter slept in bed with me because I couldn't possibly get up to feed her. Besides, it was our time together. On one of those nights after the baby woke me for the hundredth time, I said to myself in my delirium, "Now which account is *this* time chargeable to?" Such were my demented reckonings.

We moved; I became pregnant again and was up for another promotion. Once again I drove myself half to death so as to reach my target revenues before the baby came. When I came home from work late at night, all I could do was lie comatose in my daughter's bed while she played around me. My husband was still working long evening hours for ridiculously low pay; I was still rushing home to relieve the nanny.

Ten weeks before the baby was due, our nanny had to leave. Our darling, divine nanny, she was our home. She adored my daughter, kept the apartment from falling apart, and nurtured us all. I felt bereft and abandoned.

I booked my daughter into the emergency day care near my work, and lugged her up and down the myriad steps of the New York subway daily to get her there. She hated day care and I hated leaving her there. It was corporate style, with no windows and a rotating staff who consistently delivered the company's trademarked brand of rudeness.

I had our second baby, was promoted again, and stayed on the accelerating treadmill. Every day of maternity leave I checked my e-mail and voicemail, quite reasonably terrified that the business I had worked so hard to build would evaporate while I was away. My husband tried to convince me to return to work part time.

"Are you out of your *mind*?" I said. "Part-timers are part-human. I'm not a 'part-anything' person. It's either all or nothing for me."

During my leave, the firm I worked for merged into another, larger one. I panicked: what would happen to my carefully coddled business? After working in my own little corner for so many years, what would it be like to be swallowed by a large established group? There wasn't much time to speculate.

Aaron's salary still wouldn't cover much more than the gas bill, so I plunged back into work, pumping breast milk once again. Another supervisor left, and instead of going part time I asked for a gigantic raise. After weeks of wrangling, I got most of what I wanted, but the negotiations wrecked me. Aaron began to feel that his working was becoming an absurdity.

Suddenly, I was the point person in a huge company for a key product. When I was in the office, the phone rang incessantly. Clients from all over the world invited me to visit, and often I agreed. Sometimes I would bring the family, and sometimes just the breast pump. I recruited women to help me in the business, knowing first-hand what an undervalued resource they are. I had been the first pregnant woman ever in my department when I joined the firm; now there were meetings I ran where I was the only woman who was *not* pregnant!

The pressure was enormous. I had grown from junior assistant to firm expert, all while gestating, birthing, and nursing my children. Now there were revenue goals, budgets, and obligations to my staff. I hoped that if I did all this well, I would find favor with my post-merger bosses. At home, I still nursed both my children, dealt with touchy nannies, cooked, cleaned and kept the peace.

> In the middle of the journey of my life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost.
>
> —*Dante's Inferno* Canto I

I was collapsing. No exercise, no proper meals, no reading, no shopping, no movies, no nothing except work, home, work, home. I hardly saw the light of day. I was angry. How the hell had I ended up here? I had turned into a wrung-out rag, cleaning up everyone's mess. I desperately wanted to stop working. I had reached every goal possible at my level in the office. There was nothing more to learn except how to multiply what I had done by infinity. At home, I was so endlessly tired that I enjoyed nothing, and used all my energy to stop myself from blowing up at the kids. My wonderful kids. I wanted to spend my time with *them. All* my time.

"Aaron, I'm finished." I said to my husband. "Now it's you're turn. Go out and get a *real* job, one that earns enough money to pay for more than the gas bill. No, I don't want to talk about it. Just go and do it."

"It's not so easy…" my husband started.

"You think what *I* do is easy?" I spat back. "I do everything here: bring in the check, hire the nanny, relieve the nanny, make the meals, fix the toilets. What is it exactly *you* do? A *real* man earns a *real* living. Why on earth do you have to work so hard if you can't even pay the rent?"

My fury consumed me. *Arbeit macht Frei* was a bitter deception. Work was not giving me choices; it was making me a slave. Aaron was not going to be able to save me, either. He had made his pact with the devil already, by throwing out spiritual pursuits and going into social work. What else could he do for me? He just didn't have the cunning, the smarts, the salesmanship that you need to earn a decent living in New York. Now he was losing me to insanity. In his situation, with that kind of pressure, my father would have done whatever it took. But there was no demon inside Aaron telling him *Arbeit uber Alles*. He thought it was silly that I drove myself into the ground; why didn't I just go part-time? I realized he wasn't going to find a job to support us before I went under.

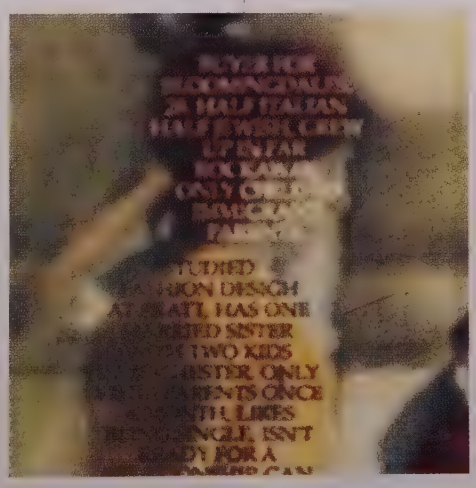
Then, out of the blue, someone called and offered me an appointment with the U.S. Government in Washington D.C. The job was the highest position in my field and promised all the stimulation of my old job without any of the pressure. The problem was, I didn't want a grand title, I wanted the job of stay-at-home-mother. With all my fancy experience, no one could offer me that. We hemmed and hawed for a while. This opportunity wouldn't liberate me, but my husband could stop working and we would be nanny-free. Washington is a livable, affordable, and beautiful city. We found a community waiting to welcome us. People had manners and they cared. The government people called again and again asking me to join.

We took the plunge.

So here I am, working wife with stay-at-home men, several of them. It's O.K., I suppose. My job is bearable. I have started exercising, and stopped nursing. Though I still ache for my children when I'm at work and have only enough time for a long goodnight routine with them when I come home, at least I'm not falling apart while I orchestrate it. What's more, I plucked up the courage to ask for a four-day workweek and the earth did not open up beneath me. That first Friday off, I thought I'd chanced into the Next World.

What's more, my husband turns out to be a wonderful house spouse. Between him and our paratrooper-turned-housecleaner, the children are happy and our home isn't falling down. Aaron does the laundry—a key duty—and loads the dishwasher. He's even started paying attention to things like meals. He takes *pride* in his role, and gets upset if I rock the boat by offering junk food instead of dinner or letting the kids stay up late. Like most house spouses, his role doesn't exactly satisfy him, though. There's no one to talk to, and he feels he's not making a meaningful Contribution to Humanity, not leaving a Legacy.

"Sweetheart," I say calmly now, "The day your Legacy or Contribution brings in the bread, I'll leave my job. That's a promise." ■



For my father,
a Holocaust survivor,
work was a sacrament.

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Prayer

Three Women Appropriate its Power

Men have had 3000 years or so to match up Jewish rituals with their felt needs, whereas we women are still babes in the woods. Here is a simple three-part recipe for experiencing holiness. In these pages, three women model for LILITH readers what it means to **(1) begin one's spiritual path with a visceral moment:** Gee, I need to do *something* with this placenta; whoa, I'm not ready, after a year of saying kaddish, to stop praying every day; *yipes*, who could have guessed that breastfeeding would turn out to be a profound religious experience?

Next, all three of the women you are about to read realize, contrary to our faith's *minyan* fetish, that they love to **(2) be a spiritual solitary**—like many women and very few men. Digging a hole all alone on a September eve; laying tefillin after everyone has left the house; entering a state of *being* Mother Nature. Having only ourselves as witnesses often works beautifully for us, though it disorganizes religion.

Finally, each of these women discovers **(3) how to experience one's body as directly linked to the sacred:** breasts; afterbirth; "the soft bite of cool leather straps" on our skin. Women's bodies are often where we meet God. Beyond nursing or birthing or menstrual taboos (that are products of male envy and have rendered our bodies more difficult for us to read) are unmediated doorways to the sacred. In contrast, the ritual of circumcision gets a D+—it's not the miracle of a child, the absoluteness of maternal attachment, the dangerous magic of a body that bleeds and feeds.

Bound for Glory: Females in Phylacteries

How an otherwise non-religious woman finds herself transformed by tefillin

BY RUTH HOROWITZ

Every morning, as soon as I have the house to myself, I go back into my bedroom, clip a small, suede *kippah* to my hair, and drape a wool *tallis* over my shoulders. Then I roll up my left sleeve and position a little black box against my biceps. Inside the box is a bit of parchment with four passages from the Torah commanding me to bind the words they contain to my arm. Whispering a blessing, I take the strap that holds the box and spiral it down my arm exactly seven times. A second box goes on the front of my head, each prescribed gesture accompanied by its own prescribed blessing. Then I wrap the strap from my hand three times around my middle finger, reciting with each turn a line from the prophet Hosea: *"I betroth you to Me forever; I betroth you to Me in righteousness, justice, kindness and compassion; I betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall know God."* When all this has been done, I'm ready to begin my morning prayers.

"Laying *tefillin*," as it's called, gives prayer a tangible dimension that helps the worshiper focus. Symbolically, binding God's commandments to the arm and the head serves as a reminder that human actions and thoughts should be directed toward the good. For over two thousand years, laying *tefillin* has been a standard part of the Jewish male's daily observance, a crown of adulthood for the bar mitzvah boy. Aryeh Kaplan's booklet, "*Tefillin*," for Orthodox teenagers calls phylacteries a sign of the "bond of love" between God and man. The "man" part is no accident. Up until the last few decades, *tefillin* have been strictly a guy thing. Though early rabbinical writings include a few notable examples of women

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who wore them, these instances are so unusual that to many Jews the practice seems unnatural. In a chapter headed, "For Girls Only," the booklet cheerfully asserts, "The home is a woman's *tefillin*." Because we, unlike our poor deprived male counterparts, can have babies, the tract explains, we "partake of God's attributes more intimately than any man," and therefore don't need extra emblems of holiness.

Some opponents of females in phylacteries frame their arguments in less kindly terms: *Tefillin* contain portions of the Torah, and our messy female fluids make us too unclean to have physical contact with these sacred texts. According to Jewish law, women are exempt from *mitzvot* that need to be performed at specific times in a day (*tefillin* are donned for morning prayers), but this exemption has hardened, for many, into an actual ban. *Tefillin* have also been understood as off-limits to us because Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits cross-dressing. As absurd as these arguments sound, they have serious ramifications: Just two years ago, Israel's ultra-Orthodox Shas Party pushed for legislation that would have punished any woman caught wearing *tefillin* at the Western Wall with seven years in prison.

Even most gender-egalitarian Jews who are used to seeing women wear prayer shawls and read from the Torah blanch at the idea of women wearing *tefillin*; it simply carries the air of taboo. Among the people I know, many of whom are much more observant than I am, I only know of one other woman who wears them. And though I've been doing it almost daily for over a year, the fact that I do continues to surprise me each time I feel the soft bite of the cool, leather strap on my skin.

My decision to take on *tefillin* was a natural next step in a process that had started a year earlier, when my mother died. For years, I'd maintained the same casual, twice-a-year relationship with religion as I'd grown up with, dropping my kids off at Hebrew School, but rarely setting foot inside a synagogue myself. But my mother had always warned that if someone died, God forbid, I'd want to talk to a rabbi. And I did. At my first bereavement counseling session, we talked about the Jewish law that requires that an orphan recite the Mourner's Kaddish prayer every day for eleven months in the company of a minyan. The rabbi gently cautioned me not to commit to an obligation I couldn't fulfill. I was undeterred. And before long, what I began from a sense of duty became the highlight of my days.

There's nothing fancy about the 7 p.m. minyan. An assortment of Jews trickle in, some to say Kaddish, some simply to be there, others answering a last-minute call from the rabbi. Sometimes it takes a while to marshal the needed 10, and while we wait, we chat inconsequentially. The service itself lasts about 15 minutes. Then the worshipers shake hands, wish one another well, and hurry home. To the outsider, the ritual must seem numbingly mundane. But for the mourner, gathering with a group of people who simply come to stand beside you can be enormously consoling. And to the person who's feeling as if the roof has been ripped away from overhead, the very routineness of minyan gives a comforting structure to days that may feel frighteningly chaotic. All day long, in those first few weeks after my mother's funeral, I needed to hold myself together—pay attention to my family, turn out my work assignments, take care of the laundry and put dinner on the table. Minyan offered 15 blissful minutes when I could let down my guard, give in to my grief, and, as time passed, notice, and feel glad that my pain was abating.

> It's as if, within the unspoken hierarchy of Jewish observance, I've stolen all the bases and gone straight for home.

February came and went—my first month as an orphan—and still, every night, just as my husband sat down to his second helping of dinner, I'd push back my chair, throw on my coat, and drive off to minyan. Saturday mornings, I hurried to synagogue, desperate not to miss a minute of the two-and-a-half hour Sabbath service. Week by week, as the sting of my grief waned, my official mourner's status was becoming a convenient pretext for what really kept drawing me back. Somehow—between the soothing nostalgia of sounds from my childhood, the solace of repeated ritual, the relief of briefly stepping out of my life, and my vast well of vulnerability—I'd stopped being a spectator, and was actually praying. To what or whom, I couldn't quite say. Certainly not the angry man with the flowing white beard sitting on his heavenly throne. Words like love and unity are easier to swallow than the G-word.

More than specific messages beamed up to some supernatural being, my prayers feel like a form of internal reaching towards an intensely peaceful sense of connectedness. Once I found this feeling through prayer, I started noticing it all over the place: while walking by the lake, while making love, while helping my kids with their homework, even while calling my cranky grandmother on the phone. Once I started getting it, I couldn't get enough of it. And the best way, for me, to get more was to practice more Judaism.

By April, I was no longer sitting on the side-lines at minyan, but stepping up to the front and leading the prayers. Six months later, the cantor was teaching me to chant in Hebrew from the Torah, and I was studying the texts with the rabbi

and delivering occasional sermons. People started asking me if I'd considered attending rabbinical school. For Chanukah, my husband treated me to my own *tallis*—an acknowledgment that although my 11 months of mourning would soon be ended, my new involvement with Judaism was far from over.

But without a mourner's obligation to say Kaddish, what form would my observance take? Left to my own devices, I would have gladly kept up the daily routine. I probably also would have made more than a nod at observing *kashrut*, and at extending my observance of Shabbat. I wasn't living in a vacuum, however, and although my family had accepted, and even supported, my new life as a Jew, they didn't share it. It didn't seem fair to continue to disappear on them every night, or ask them to say goodbye to bacon with their eggs. I began my second year of orphanhood on a reduced synagogue schedule: Shabbat mornings and just one or two evening services a week. But I made up for the minyans I was missing by *davening* the morning service on my own at home. And I upped my spiritual ante by taking on *tefillin*.

Women's Tefillin

Ayana Friedman, a tefillin artist in Jerusalem, says: "I chose to make my tefillin oval, using velvet, satin, beads, and gold and silver thread, because I wanted to represent softness and femininity. The use of a dead animal's skin did not seem right to me. The embroidered surface is an homage to women's traditional crafts, which have not been properly valued through the years. The colors—blue and white—represent spirituality and purity: the endless sky, and a bride's dress or a clean Sabbath table cloth."

A prayer written by the artist with Rabbi Einat Ramon (here shortened and modified by Rabbi Susan Schnur), can be tucked into the tefillin:

"It is now my intention, God, to unify the circles of my being: My soul, the wisdom of my heart, my deeds, my household, my Torah, my tree of life, the universe in its entirety. I set this before You, God, all bound together."

[The cost of a pair of tefillin is $300. Contact Ayana at gideonf@md.huji.ac.il]

Of all the unexpected rituals I've found myself observing—touching mezuzahs as I walk through doorways, reciting the "*Modeh Ani*" when I awaken—none has felt stranger than this one. The very idea of encasing words in a little black box and attaching the box to your body for half an hour each morning sounds like science fiction, or like slipping a textbook under your pillow the night before an exam. The smell of the leather, and the pleasure I feel when it tightens against my skin, seem to come curiously close to kinky. But the hardest hurdle has been alienation. Unlike the cadences of Torah and the taste of Manischewitz, I have no early memories of *tefillin*. Before I put them on myself, I'd only seen anyone wrapped in them on the rare occasions when I'd wandered into a weekday morning service and found a handful of men with one sleeve rolled up. The dark leather spiraling their arms and the bizarre black boxes balanced on their heads took me aback, as if I'd stumbled on some secret ceremony I wasn't meant to witness. But I'd moved so far inside the religion by now that to feel estranged from such a basic ritual was unacceptable. I took my internal recoiling as a challenge to try *tefillin*, myself.

It helped that I already happened to have some of my own. They'd belonged to my great-grandfather. My grandmother handed them down to me when my son was born. For 12 years, they'd been buried in my closet, along with a small, silk *tallis*, a yellowed *talit katan* with sacramental fringes, and a Jewish pocket calendar from 1947. When I brought the *tefillin* to the rabbi, he explained that they weren't really a set—one for the arm and one for the head—but a mismatched pair of frontlets, both made for wearing on the head. Unperturbed, he pulled out a pile of stray *tefillin*—the legacy of men who'd once gathered to *daven Shacharit*, perhaps as far back as the 1880's. Among them, he found an arm piece that matched one of my great-grandfather's head *tefillin*. And he gave me some supple new straps to replace the brittle old ones.

What would my great-grandfather and that other, nameless congregant think if they could see their beloved *tefillin* being worn by a woman—and one whose marriage to a non-Jew most Jewish authorities don't even officially recognize? By the same token, how can I, an educated person—a progressive thinker and a feminist—be wrapping myself up in a tradition that defies rational thinking and for millennia denied the full humanity of women? Even many of my friends who are feminist Jews stop short of *tefillin*. They reason that if they're not willing to follow such fundamental rules as keeping kosher and not driving on Shabbat, they haven't earned the right to take on this obligation. It's as if, within the unspoken hierarchy of Jewish observance, I've stolen all the bases and gone straight for home.

From so many angles, this picture looks wrong. And yet, being held in the wrap of the straps feels absolutely right. Feminism, at its core, is about personal liberation. Each morning, as part of Judaism's prescribed dawn blessings, I acknowledge the divine source of my freedom. The words I wear are generations old. But their bond to me is brand new. By my very act of participating in the tradition, I turn it into an agent of my own emancipation.

I close the prayer book, kiss its corner, and carefully set it down. I remove my *tefillin*, exactly reversing the order in which I put them on. I roll down my sleeve and boot up my computer. The leather straps have etched faint lines into my skin. As I start my day's work, I can feel it subtly tingling. ■

RUTH HOROWITZ is a journalist and the author of four children's books. She lays *tefillin* in Burlington, Vermont.

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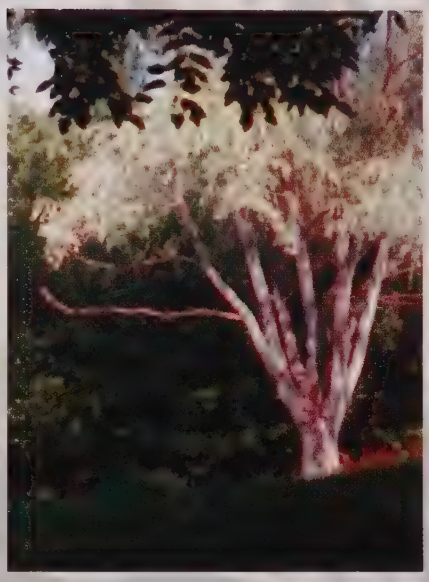
A quiet ritual for

Burying the Baby's Placenta

If this isn't prayer, what is?"

BY CATHERINE GROSSMAN



The ground was hard and my progress was slow. The metal edge of my shovel only chipped away at the cold clay. I worked harder, and my breathing grew heavy. A wedge-shaped piece came loose and I set it next to the hole. My placenta wasn't that large, but I wanted a hole at least two feet deep.

I was alone under the weeping willow tree on top of the hill behind our house. My husband and I were living in upstate New York where five counties were named after the five tribes that made up the Iroquois Nation: the Onondaga, the Oneida, the Cayuga, the Mohawk and the Seneca. From where I stood I could see the rooftops of houses in the village and the cooling towers of a nuclear power plant on Lake Ontario—40 miles away. The earth rolled out flat like a great Persian carpet and stopped at the rocky shores of Lake Ontario. Our little hill was just the beginning of a trend, a group of little hills that hung together as if they knew there was strength in numbers. They traveled south and grew with each mile into the Allegheny mountains of Pennsylvania.

I was often aware of how far our homestead was from the sea and its rhythmic pounding of the surf, and the cyclic rise and fall of the tides that remind us of the presence of the moon. When you're landlocked, you have to listen carefully to the pulse of the salty blood in your own veins to know how the cycles turn. Though identified as a Jew, I had felt a growing kinship with Native peoples since moving to this area. I had put dream catchers above both my babies' cribs, and I celebrated Jewish holidays by first symbolically cleansing myself with smoke from a combination of lavender, sweet grass and sage. Somehow, standing at the top of the hill, shovel in hand, I felt quietly in touch with all of this.

My mother, who had had six children, never mentioned placentas to us when we were little. It was not the type of organ that got much discussion. We talked stomachs and hearts, lungs and sometimes kidneys. When I was pubescent my mother told me about uteruses, ovaries and fallopian tubes. Later, about breasts and prostates, as in cancer—but never placentas.

When I got pregnant myself, I made an effort to learn about them. A placenta grows in a womb from the baby's own cells and it attaches to the uterine wall, becoming an essential life-support. In terms of size alone, it is easily larger than any of the major organs except, perhaps, the liver. Like a waste-water treatment plant, the placenta acts as a sieve and filter for the fetus. It is essential; without it, a baby would die. Since, in biological terms, the placenta belongs to the baby, it seemed to me that it was the baby who was doing the initial work of connecting to the mother. That alone, I thought, made the placenta deserving of respect.

All of this was academic, though, when I actually saw my children's placentas in their stainless steel delivery bowls. They were huge—they can be between six and 12 inches in diameter—and they looked like large slabs of seitan (a high protein, firm-textured food derived from wheat gluten). A placenta, though, is only a temporary organ, and not only that, but a hidden, behind-the-scenes one. Even in feminist circles, it has not gotten much attention.

A placenta is a temporary female organ, a hidden, behind-the-scenes one. Even in feminist circles, it has not gotten much attention.

I missed the generation of feminist women who once gathered in living rooms, sat in circles, distributed mirrors and gazed with awe at the details of their pudenda. They wanted to know their bodies, love their bodies, celebrate the female body and wrest it away from critical judgments of "too fat," "too thin," "too unresponsive," "too seductive." These feminist inroads reverberated through my family, and although I missed the ramparts years, they informed my childbirth choices.

My first child, Anna, was born at home, but by the time I was pregnant with my second we had moved to upstate New York where homebirths are illegal. I met with my midwife in the birthing center in Ithaca—two hours from my home—

once a month. She reviewed with me how I was supposed to take care of myself, and gave me a list of the things I needed to have on hand for the birth. I felt like a French voyageur getting ready to explore inland rivers. Among my supplies was the stainless steel bowl for the placenta. Nobody told me I had to save my placenta and bury it, but I had done it before, I had read about other women who had, and while I was not sure exactly why I wanted to, I knew that I did.

> My mother, who had six children, never mentioned this organ. She talked to me about uteruses, ovaries and fallopian tubes. Later, about breasts and prostates—as in cancer. But never *placentas*.

Since the center was so far away, it required more planning on my part, including remembering to bring a cooler along so we could take the placenta home. It would keep until I was ready to bury it. I had a rebellious feeling knowing that my placenta sat in the freezer, frozen hard. Like receiving reparations from an offending government, I had something that was mine that many people thought I ought not to have. In any case, I moved it around for months as I rummaged through the freezer looking for corn tortillas, frozen spinach pies and tofu dogs.

After two months, I still had not buried it. The leaves were foreshadowing the six-month winter of central New York. I was still waiting for a *reason* to bury it. I assumed the Native American women before me had all buried their placentas. I imagined that it was a milestone for each woman, but what kind of milestone? I needed to wait until I understood what I was doing. I was burying what had been vital to my child. So how did that affect me?

I was three months postpartum when the autumn equinox neared and I was more rested. My newborn had learned the difference between night and day; our family routines had finally adapted to her presence and to the absence of our many visitors who had returned to their own homes. I felt more capable of taking over. I started to feel that the placenta represented all the help the baby had had thus far. I wanted to bury it as a demarcation between those lazy baby days of endless nursing, of endless hours of visiting and of the meals and laundry on the automatic pilot of friends and family who had helped to weave an invisible protective cocoon—a cocoon, it struck me, that was indeed also a 'placenta'—from which the baby and I were now moving on. Family and friends were gone. I was supposed to resume my duties; return to work, make the meals and do the laundry.

Burying my placenta, I also started to think, would represent as well my promises to my daughter—though I knew that even as I made these promises, as I do during the *Kol Nidre* service on Yom Kippur, I would be anticipating breaking them and forgiving myself for doing so. *May these vows not be vows.* I vow to use cloth diapers—but I forgive myself if I don't. I vow not to give her any solid food until at least six months—but maybe I will want a few extra hours of sleep at night. I needed to let go of the placenta and of the friends and family who had come to help and were now gone. By burying it, I was marking my own commitment to sustain and support my baby daughter, Maya.

Finally, one evening late in September, I pulled the cold, hard package from the freezer, grabbed a shovel and walked to the top of the hill. The old willow tree stood alone on the crest of the top terrace. I dug past the sod in the hard clay. The ground did not give way easily and I was glad. I wanted and needed some of my muscle groups to work, to feel in my body the significance of this new beginning.

The last time my muscles had worked so hard was to bring the baby into this world, and digging felt like an acknowledgment of that, a way to bring this time of my life to a close. Another wedge of moist, gray clay came loose and I laid it on the pile next to the hole. I was not as strong as I thought; still postpartum, I tired easily. As I dug the clay out of the deepening hole, I sensed the presence of Native American women before me. Perhaps they had stood on this same hill; surely we had all participated in this solitary act with the selfsame heart.

When the hole looked right, I leaned the shovel against the tree and gathered my thoughts: Maya made the first connection to me. This placenta is hers; she generated it from her own cells. It is my turn to make the second connection to her, a *kapparah* of solidarity with the Jewish spiritual season that I also felt stirring in the autumn air, a whiff of promises and reconnections and fresh beginnings: *This for that; for your offering, my offering.*

I placed the placenta in my two-foot hole and covered it with soil. And then I prayed:

I agree to be your mother. After I give you all that I can, and you walk away to claim your own homeland, may you always, through your long life ahead, find a source to sustain you. Amen. ■

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Nursing in Shul

God-the-Breast: Why isn't this image as familiar [and hallowed?] to us as God-the-King-of-the-Universe?

BY AURORA MENDELSOHN

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My husband and I had just moved to Maryland and were attending our new synagogue for the first time with our nine-month-old daughter. During the service, she began to fuss; she was hungry and wanted to nurse. I looked around nervously, knowing that breastfeeding in public offends a fair number of people. Some find it a disconcerting reminder that human beings are animals; others that it is somehow an inappropriate erotic display. Our culture sees breasts first and foremost as sexual, when really their primary purpose is to nurse. I sat weighing my options: Leave the service and nurse my baby outside, or stay put and possibly offend someone whom I didn't even yet know? For me, prayer is a serious commitment. Why did I have to choose between one holy act and another?

In our previous synagogue, my *minhag* [custom] had been to take the baby into the sanctuary hallway to nurse; that way I could still hear the service. Unfortunately, the shul had set aside the library (which was upstairs and down a corridor) for nursing mothers. It was only a matter of time before somebody voiced their opinion about my breastfeeding in the more public place, while praying. I, though, had come to see nursing as a holy act, a transformative spiritual experience that had, in fact, been responsible for my re-energized engagement with Judaism. It was through the embodied acts of birthing and most particularly breastfeeding that I had powerfully come to know the meaning of the word "sacred." I knew that Judaism stresses modesty, but also views the body as created in the image of God, and thus holy. Increasingly, I came to understand that one reason breastfeeding was so moving to me was that it was a potent metaphor for God's nurturance.

The truth was, I could no longer feel at home *theologically* in a synagogue where I could not freely nurse my child, as that would mean having to shut off the part of myself that had led me to see the holiness in the world. And more powerful to me even than that, perhaps, was that nursing had brought me to see *myself* as intimately a facet of that world's holiness.

Going over all of this in my head as I sat in our new synagogue, I steeled myself for congregants' disapproval, opened my shirt, and put the baby to my breast. Soon she was sleeping, and my husband and I were able to stay and participate fully in the Shabbat service. The words "participate fully," actually, don't begin to do justice to the experience. Holding my child, feeding her from my own body while chanting the ancient texts about the creative and nurturing power of God was a unique opportunity to actually embody those sacred words.

Breastfeeding has had an impact on me in other ways as well. Even before I became the steward of another person's body, I was committed to the many advantages of breastfeeding over bottle-feeding. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, nursing offers protection from many diseases and disorders, not only during the time that the mother and child actually engage in it, but throughout the remainder of *both* parties' lives. I also saw how a mother's emotional connection to her baby evolves naturally from the biological act of nursing—from the calming hormones released in both mother and baby, and from the fact that a mother cannot go more than several hours without feeding (or pumping milk for) her child, and thus cannot be separated from him or her for more than a day.

> Why should I have to choose between one holy act and another?

As a feminist, I was also experiencing breastfeeding as an answer to our culture's conceptual monopoly of women's bodies, to the fact that most of us perceive our corporeal selves in relation to societal ideals of feminine beauty and sexuality, and consequently beat ourselves up for falling short. Through breastfeeding I had come to relate to my body in a new way: as a powerful and creative force. When a friend of mine spoke with great pride about her accomplishment in relation to her three-month-old son—describing how she had grown him herself from material in her own body, first in the womb and then beyond—I felt she accurately depicted my own experience.

Breastfeeding also made me feel responsible environmentally. Formula uses lots of packaging materials, and requires ecologically unfriendly fuel to manufacture it, transport it and heat it. Breast milk, on the other hand, is one of the few food

products that arrives in our homes ready-to-eat with no packaging whatsoever. Having a part of one's very self become, like manna, an ideal food product—life-giving, fresh, completely recyclable, no refrigeration necessary, and available whenever my baby called for it—could only heighten my concern for responsible, sustainable foods.

Because I was familiar with the challenges that classical Judaism holds for feminists, I was surprised to discover, in the course of my research, how many positive and moving references to nursing exist in traditional Jewish sources. Until fairly recently, nursing was, of course, a life-or-death issue: If you couldn't nurse, your baby simply starved, unless, that is, you could afford a wet nurse. Breasts are portrayed in the Torah, Midrash and Talmud as a gift from God, a miracle and a blessing, whose purpose is to sustain life.

In the Talmud, for example, the biblical Hannah, barren, offers God the following challenge:

> *Ruler of the World, among the things that you created in women, you have not made one without a purpose: eyes to see, ears to hear, a mouth to speak, legs to walk with. These breasts that you put on my heart, are they not for nursing? Give me a son, then, so that I can* use *them!* [Berakhot 31B]

In biblical references to nursing, the act is understood as a continuation of the birthing process. After Isaac is born to a geriatric Sarah, for example, she expresses her astonishment: "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne Abraham a son in his old age!" And after we hear of the birth of Moses, the text loses very little time describing Pharoah's daughter arranging for a wet nurse, who—because of Miriam's chutzpah—turns out to be the child's own biological mother. Yet another validation of breastfeeding comes from the prophet Hosea (9:14), who, in a fever of rhetoric, invokes upon wayward humanity one of the worst curses he can imagine: "Give them wombs that miscarry!" he cries to God, "and breasts that are dry!"

Abraham said to Sarah: "This is not a time for modesty. To hallow God's name, uncover your breast so that all may be aware of the miracles that the Holy One has begun to perform."

[Midrash, genesis Rabbah, 53:9]

The significance of nursing to our biblical ancestors is also implied by the many texts that address weaning. According to midrash, Moses is weaned at two years [Exodus Rabbah 1:31]; the Talmud gives several estimates for the period of nursing ranging from two to five years [Ketubbot 60A]; and the Apocrypha makes reference to three years [Maccabees II 7:27]. Weaning ceremonies are major occasions. Abraham, in Genesis 21:8, holds a "great feast" on the day that Isaac is weaned and invites dignitaries (Baba Metziah 87a; Genesis Rabbah 53:9-10). Hannah turns her son Samuel (who will one day lead the Israelites as prophet and judge) over to the priesthood on the day that he is weaned (Samuel I, 1:21-24), bringing with her to Shiloh "a skin of wine, an *ephah* of flour" and a bull. Since then, weaning ceremonies have evolved as having two components: First, a thanksgiving to God for the fact that the child did not die in infancy (a realistic concern until quite recently); and second, some sort of ritual connoting the beginning of the child's independence.

Most powerful, though, I think, is the biblical image of God not as "King" or "Ruler of the Universe" or "Lord" (epithets that supplanted other threatening female images of divinity), but "God, the Nursing Mother." In post-biblical Jewish writings, this God is suppressed; in the Bible, She makes quite a few appearances, but still seems to go unnoticed by readers.

In Isaiah's eschatological vision, God's breasts become a source of infinite consolation, and, indeed, one of God's well-known biblical names, Shaddai, is linguistically derived from the Akkadian and northwest Semitic root that means "mountains," which evolves to mean "breasts." According to some scholars, this "God of Breasts" clearly refers to a differently attuned aspect of our ancient religious cult than the one that increasingly invoked the God we call "Yahweh" or "Adonai" —divine names that came to define classical, patriarchal Judaism. The Hebrew word "*shad*" means "breast." "Shaddai" (the name of God written on *mezuzot*, on tefillin, and in many Jewish texts) evokes the image of God with breasts or God nursing, and is literally translatable not as "Lord, Our God," or "God, My Salvation," but "God of Breasts" or "God Who Nurses."

Isaiah, 66:10-13 thrills me with its imagery of both Jerusalem and God as breastfeeding Earth Mother, and of burgeoning nations as ever-abundant breast milk:

> *"Be joyful with Jerusalem, all you who love her, all you who mourn over her, that you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, that you may suck deeply and be delighted with her bountiful breast! For this is what the Lord says: 'Behold, I extend peace to her like a river; and the glory of nations like an overflowing stream. You will be suckled and carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.'"*

Throughout the book of Genesis, the name Shaddai is also connected with blessings of fertility. When Jacob blesses his son Joseph, for example (Genesis 49:25), he says, "Shaddai will bless you with blessings of the heavens above, of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb." [Genesis 49:25.]

The image of God as a nursing mother provides breastfeeding women with an image of ourselves as God, and an understanding of our baby's utter dependence upon us as the extrapolated condition of all humankind. When we as parents relieve our newborns from their helplessness and their inability to exert control over their circumstances, we identify with our babies' worldview. Indeed, hunger, cold, discomfort and the threat of endless loneliness present themselves…at least until the All-Powerful One appears and instantly provides food and shelter, warmth and love, and a seeming ability to mind-read

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What's this about God being female? With breasts and all? How'd this happen?

RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR IN CONVERSATION WITH SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

The relationship between the Jewish God and the Israelite people is often described in the Bible metaphorically as a heterosexual "marriage," so that when the Israelites stray into worshipping "other Gods," the biblical God becomes a cuckold, and the Hebrews get characterized as "adulterers." But unlike pagan Gods of the ancient world, whose sexual capers with mortals got splashed across cuneiform tabloids far and wide, the biblical God kept His relationship with us companionate…except, that is, for one weird fling described in Genesis 6:1-4: "The divine Elohim saw how beautiful female mortals were, and took whomever was pleasing…and they bore children." If you've ever wondered why Jews are so smart, this could be your answer.

But if our biblical He-God (this flukey verse aside) didn't have sex with our forebears, He still enjoyed the occasional *menage a trois*. How do we know this? Because the Matriarchs in Genesis —every one except Leah—get cast in our holy scripts as "barren women"—a plot device, frankly, that strains credulity, but that positions our Uber-God to intervene as figurative "Divine Stud." When the women conceive (which, of course, they ultimately do), it's not *literally* "divine impregnation," but it's certainly related.

But there's also another God in Hebrew Scriptures—mentioned 48 times —called, variously, "Shaddai" or "El Shaddai," to whom readers, over the centuries, have paid scant attention. She is something else. When Jacob, in Genesis 49:25, for example, blesses his youngest son with "the blessings of the breasts and womb," the deity he appeals to is "Shaddai," whose name, perhaps, is a play on words; *"shad"* means "breast" in Hebrew. We know for a fact that there was another Shaddai in the ancient Near East who went by the same moniker, but this diety was clearly not the "God of Breasts" or the "God Who Suckles Us" or anything related. This "Shaddai," Akkadian in origin, was rather the "God of the Mountains," or "Steppes," or "Plains"—confusing, because they are very different land masses. If we were to worship this Shaddai today, the most accurate rendering of Him/Her would probably be "God of Undeveloped Real Estate Parcels," because that was the understanding of this Shaddai's territory—everything "out there," beyond our clotheslines and chaff winnowers and potter's wheels. It was this God, in all likelihood, who morphed over time into "God Our Breast" or "God Our Nursing Mother," on account of the bilingual word-play of "Shaddai" and "*shad*."

There's another God—mentioned 48 times in our Scriptures—and She is something else!

David Biale, in *Eros and the Jews,* points out that the biblical He-God, interestingly, never gets described as having a penis or beard or hairy back, whereas the She-God definitely gets breasts and a uterus. Furthermore, if we want to make sense of Genesis 1:27 ("God created man in His image…male and female He [sic] created them")—rather than glossing over this as we've done for centuries—what we see is "God the Hermaphrodite," one of the weirder walk-on parts occasioned by the awkward invention of monotheism. Examples of the She-God-Who-Gives-Birth-to-the-Israelite-Nation can be found in Deut. 32:18 ("You forgot the God who birthed you"), in Deutero-Isaiah 46:3-4 ("Harken to me, all who come from my uterus. When you turn gray, I will still be carrying you. I have made, and I will bear, I will carry and I will deliver"), and in Isaiah 42:14 ("Now I will scream like a woman in labor, I will pant and I will gasp"—which I love.)

The ancient Canaanites, we need to remember, lived intimately alongside Israelites, and archeological digs have unearthed many Barbie-breasted figurines of the Goddesses Asherah and Anat. These fertility Goddesses had husbands—the Gods El and Baal. Indeed, there are ancient inscriptions that pair Yahweh (a.k.a. YHWH or Jehovah) up with His wife Asherah!—the latter being so culturally central to the region that She was even worshipped in the Temple. Biale points out a Canaanite text that gives these Goddesses the epithet "Wet Nurses of the Gods," and another that mentions "the divine breasts of Asherah and Raham"—the latter name looking suspiciously, Biale notes, like "the blessings of the breasts and womb" [in Hebrew, *"rehem"*] with which Jacob blesses Joseph.

So how did Shaddai get slipped into the Bible, anyhow? When certain redactors of the texts—whose agenda, in the 7th century B.C..E., was heavy-duty monotheism—took their editorial pencils to the lines, they decided that rather than trying to beat the local dieties (a tactic which had proven worthless before), they would conjoin them. The God El gets folded, therefore, into the God Yahweh; El's consort Asherah becomes Shaddai; and "El Shaddai"—once two gods, male and female—becomes "androgynously monotheized," in Biale's words, into one God that the Bible calls "El Shaddai."

So can women validly reclaim Shaddai as God the Mother, or Our Nursing Goddess, or God Our Nurturer, or God Our Breast, if there is cultural but not philological connection? Professor Diane M. Sharon from the Jewish Theological Seminary says, "unequivocally yes. It's essential that women integrate this imagery spiritually into our lives—otherwise, the images die. I'd say it's our midrashic responsibility to reuse these images, to infuse them with new and meaningful life." ■

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ones most profound needs and wishes.

When my husband is unable to console our daughter he passes her to me, jokingly calling me "god." Indeed, breastfeeding has given me a powerful new theology. It is both exhilarating and terrifying to have a human being completely dependent on you. My responsibilities have given me a taste of the sacred, of God's role in relation to comforting humanity, of what it means to be the one in charge, the *axis mundi,* the 'idealized object'—the grownup, the parent.

Our experience of the divine starts with our images of our parents: In the face of our terrifying helplessness, they seem omnipotent, beneficent and omniscient. As adults, the image of God as our nurturing parent still resonates emotionally for us from the prayer book, even as it may trouble some of us intellectually. The nursing mother is the ultimate icon for this nurturing force that is the bedrock upon which we build our concept of God.

This image is relevant and evocative in a way that God the King, or God the Warrior, or God the Ruler of the Universe is not. Through my own breasts—my own *shadayim*—I made a profound Jewish connection to God the Nursing Mother, to the God who extends peace to us like a river of milk, who assures us of overflowing streams when our lives depend on it, who carries us on Her hip and keeps us alive with Her nurturant breast. As I try to do for my child.

Mothers should be able to nurse in synagogues everywhere, and be celebrated for doing what's an inherently religious—indeed, Jewish—act. Religious texts that validate—rather than suppress—the powerful image of God the Nursing Mother need to be publicized so that congregants can begin to conceive of breastfeeding as sacred and miraculous. Genesis Rabbah 53:9, for example, reads:

> *"Our mother Sarah was exceedingly modest, so that our father Abraham had to say to her, 'This is not a time for modesty. To hallow God's name, uncover your breast, so that all may be aware of the miracles that the Holy One has begun to perform.' Sarah uncovered her breast, and her nipples poured out milk like jets of water!"*

Nursing mothers will understand Sarah's modesty as their own; fathers will have religious precedent for providing support to their breastfeeding wives: Abraham here clearly argues that, in nursing, holiness and the connection to the divine trump modesty.

We need to appeal to this aspect of Jewish tradition when barriers to nursing are raised, to challenge our synagogues and boardrooms to actively welcome nursing mothers. Let our voices be heard as Jews in advocating for the full support of nursing families in the workplace and in the larger society. After all, nursing mothers in our midst make manifest God's presence in our world. ■

AURORA MENDELSOHN has recently completed a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology; she lives in Silver Spring, Maryland with her husband and daughter and is a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation.

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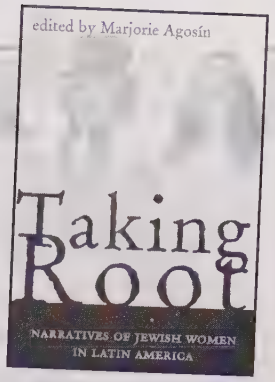

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ONE YEAR AFTER THE 9/11 TERROR ATTACKS IN THE U.S. AND TWO YEARS INTO THE INTIFADA, NAOMI DANIS ASKED SOME JEWISH AUTHORS AND EDITORS TO REFLECT ON

How Books Tell the World's Bad News to Children

Beware Sentimental Tripe

JANE YOLEN Especially in times of troubles, the desire to help is overwhelming and, of course, a writer's best way of helping is with a story.

However, it is important to remember that readers, especially child readers, bring their own baggage along to any story. The message a writer thinks she is imparting is not necessarily the one the reader hears.

Years ago I wrote a picture book artfully disguised as a folk tale. It was metaphorically the story of my life and how I met my husband. Called *The Girl Who Loved the Wind*, It was about a merchant's daughter who leaves her doting (and claustrophobic) home, where she is surrounded by very real walls, and sails off with the wind "into the ever-changing world." About twenty years after the book had been published, I received a letter from a nurse who cared for desperately ill children. She had read the story to one child who was dying, but being held to the earth by her terrified and adoring parents. The nurse told me that hours after she read the book to the child, the child had "let go," and gone beyond the walls of her world, and into the next. She felt the story had served the needs of the little girl.

Now I certainly had not written the story for that purpose. What story I could have written for her, I do not know. But not that one. Probably some smarmy, sentimental, anxious bit of tripe.

So I say, **be very very careful when trying to write (or read) a book for healing purposes.** It may not be the story you think it is. We read to find ourselves, not the author.

JANE YOLEN, known as America's Hans Christian Andersen (Newsweek) has over 230 books published for children and adults.

Truth Soothes

SUSAN RICH I am the editor of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, books that chronicle the lives of three resourceful, charming siblings who are extremely unlucky. After their parents perish in a terrible fire, the orphans are shuffled from one inadequate guardian to the next, with an evil count in constant pursuit of their inheritance. "If you like stories with happy endings," Lemony Snicket warns, "you would be better off reading some other book." Judging by the series' success—more than 5 million copies have sold in under three years—it appears that there are readers who do not prefer stories with happy endings after all. Instead, perhaps the series' success is linked to a desire for fiction that reflects the way life works. Fiction that doesn't pretend that bad things only happen to bad people, and that good behavior will be rewarded with good luck.

Daniel Handler, the author who writes as Lemony Snicket, encountered this reality when in grade school, he shared with his class the story of his father's escape from Nazi Germany. The teacher was impressed and complimented Daniel on having a very brave father. Daniel's father is an accountant and isn't often called "brave," so Daniel was eager to pass along the compliment. His father, though, was not flattered. Instead he asked, "Do you believe that I am braver than those who *didn't* make it?"

Lemony Snicket's books are sought after, maybe because they are comforting even without a happy ending. Here is a series of children's books that admit that even if you are good, bad things may happen—but you ought to behave well anyway. **Maybe, even when truths are unpleasant, truth is in itself soothing.**

SUSAN RICH is an Executive Editor at HarperCollins Children's Books

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WHY DID OUR GRANDMOTHERS SING "WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS, THE CRADLE WILL FALL, AND DOWN WILL COME CRADLE, BABY AND ALL"?

Pain Is a Teacher

JULIUS LESTER As a Jewish and black writer, confronting evil is something that has been an element of my work since *To Be A Slave* (1969). Jewish and black children have experienced the world's evil in their own flesh, and telling their stories may make it easier for children to have a context for the evils of today's world.

Having grown up in the Midwest and the South during the forties and fifties books were my refuge against a society that seemed unremittingly hostile to my existence. The content of what I read was not great literature but comic books, true crime magazines with lurid photographs of murdered corpses, detective novels and Westerns. Looking back I understand that reading such material helped me emotionally mitigate the violence that was around me, violence I could not comprehend.

I think the notion that children could or should have been protected from the world's evils was mistaken. No adult has that power. My parents could not protect me from segregation. What they could do and did do was show me how to negotiate it, when to confront it and when not. And they gave me a strong enough sense of self that I had the confidence to confront segregation.

Does anything in the Jewish tradition shape my thinking on these issues? I love Joseph whose father gave him such a strong sense of himself as a person and a Jew that he maintained his belief in Judaism even though he was by himself in an alien land.

I also love the idea that God needs us as much as we need God, that when God entered a covenantal relationship with the Jewish people, it became a reciprocal relationship, meaning God's actions could be influenced and affected by ours as much as ours by God's.

What are the redeeming things that make it possible for me to want to bring out a book that delivers some pain and sadness to a young reader? Pain is integral to being human. Pain is one of our teachers. Through pain we are given the opportunity to learn and relearn our essential humanity.

JULIUS LESTER is Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His most recent young adult novel is *When Dad Killed Mom* (Harcourt 2002).

Forget Bibliotherapy

JOHANNA HURWITZ Because I'm a former children's librarian I have a very strong opinion about bibliotherapy—using books to treat or solve problems. I do *not* believe that a children's book should be used to explain the current bad news to children any more than I would give a book about death to a youngster who has just lost a parent, or even a pet.

At this time, I would give children books of humor to lighten the depression that many who lost parents, or watched the actual destruction and collapse of the World Trade Center or overheard the news on television, are still feeling. Other books that are useful would be books of fantasy or historical fiction.

Many people have asked me if I plan to write a book about 9/11. For months I responded by saying that it was too soon to write such a book. I have written an historical novel [*Dear Emma*, HarperCollins] which takes place in New York City's Lower East Side in 1910-1911. One of the events is the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of March 25, 1911. In ten minutes 146 young girls and women lost their lives in the fire. Some burned to death inside because they couldn't open the locked doors of the factory; others managed to break windows and then jumped to their deaths when the nets that the firemen held to catch them were not strong enough to bear their weight.

Everyone in the area seemed to know someone who died in the fire. Those who did not lose family members or friends themselves knew people who did, just as we all discovered in the weeks after September 11th. The streets of lower Manhattan were covered with ash and smelled of smoke for a long time. And every eyewitness was haunted for life by the sight of young girls jumping five stories—an incredible height in that era. One day not long ago, I realized that this is, in a sense, my 9/11 book.

Yet out of the tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, good did come. Important legislation to protect workers was enacted. I am hopeful that out of the tragedy of last September there are lessons for all of us that will be learned in time.

JOHANNA HURWITZ is the author of more than 60 books for young readers, including *The Rabbis Girls* and *The Adventures of Ali Baba Bernstein.*

HOW HAVE RECENT EVENTS CHANGED THE WAY WE FRAME REALITY—OR FANTASY—FOR YOUNG READERS?

WHAT IN OUR JEWISH EXPERIENCE INFORMS THE WAY WE TELL STORIES TO CHILDREN?

War in a Picture Book?

FRAN MANUSHKIN Last year when I was teaching children's book writing in Tirana, Albania, a writer from Kosovo asked me how I would deal with war in a picture book. I replied that I wouldn't deal with it. I think children under stress need stories that emphasize close family relationships, stories with humor, and with characters who exercise some control over their lives. We cannot protect children from reality, but we can certainly give them stories that offer hope and comfort. Indeed, my Albanian students responded with the greatest enthusiasm to such classic stories of reassurance as *Goodnight, Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny*. Books can be a haven for children, and for the youngest child, I think that is one of their greatest functions.

FRAN MANUSHKIN was a children's book editor at Harper & Row and Random House, and is the author of over 30 books for children, including *Daughters of Fire: Heroines of the Bible*, and *Miriam's Cup: A Passover Story*. She teaches and mentors children's book writers and illustrators for the Open Society Institute.

Discovering Hatred

LESLÉA NEWMAN Once, when giving a talk about my book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*, a lesbian mom asked me when I thought she should tell her child that some people hate lesbians. How tragic that a parent has to even think about this issue! Her question made me try to remember the first time I learned that there are people in the world who hate Jews. I couldn't remember a time when I *didn't* know this fact. I don't remember a time when my parents sat down and told me; I don't remember being taught about anti-Semitism in school, and I had no Jewish education. I do, however, remember reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*—I still have my tattered, childhood copy. The book mesmerized me. I read the book curled up in my favorite chair with my beloved Cairn terrier at my feet, feeling very safe in the world. It was hard to imagine that once upon a time, Anne Frank felt that safe as well.

While it's important to tell children the truth about the world, I believe it is more important to infuse children's literature with hope.

LESLÉA NEWMAN's latest book is *Runaway Dreidel* (Henry Holt). Visit www.lesleakids.com to learn more about her children's books.

Don't Plant Seeds of Despair

SAMI MICHAEL I write mainly for adults, but of my four novels for young people two depict traumatic situations. *Storm Among the Palms* (1975), for example, describes how during the Second World War, while for a short period in Iraq there was a pro-Nazi government, there was a frightening pogrom against the ancient Jewish community of Baghdad. In the book, Nuri, a brave and appealing Jewish youth in a middle-class family, loses his girlfriend who is killed in the violence. I believe the book became a bestseller and a classic of Hebrew literature for young people, because it portrayed courageous and optimistic characters. It had love and humor. Also, the other side is not portrayed as a monstrosity. There were Muslims who identified with Nuri's pain, there were those who rescued his aunt and her baby from murderers. A young hungry Muslim boy was also a victim of the pogrom. Seeing the other side as uniformly cruel enemies might plant the seeds of despair that don't suit a novel for young readers.

It's possible that some of those who suffered from the trauma of September 2001 will find comfort in the message that just as the impure hands of the villains reach the entire world, so too courageous and good people can be found in every corner of the world. I don't believe that we are returning to the dark past that destroys both the cradle and the baby lying it. Maybe the cradle will be damaged here and there, but humanity from its dawning days has always occupied itself with saving its baby.

SAMI MICHAEL was born in Iraq and lives in Israel. He is author of *A Trumpet in the Wadi* which will be published in English by Simon Schuster, and was made into a feature film that opened the New York Israel film festival this past June.

Between Hopes and Reality

ETGAR KERET I'm not afraid of sad stories, because sadness is born from the clash between hopes and reality. Jewish tradition is based on asking questions and not taking things for granted. Moses, Jonah, Job and others dared to argue with God. Jewish learning in *hevruta*, too, consists of learning by arguing. I think that this tradition that both questions and respects authority and admits ambiguity and weakness in its greatest heroes affected my writing. When I write for children I write from a place that admits the complexity of life.

ETGAR KERET lives in Tel Aviv and published four books of short stories and novellas. His latest book, *The Busdriver Who Wanted to Be God* was published in the U.S. by St. Martin's Press. His writing has appeared in 21 languages.

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The Power of Anger

SANDY EISENBERG SASSO When I wrote *Cain and Abel: Finding the Fruits of Peace*, I wanted to tell a story about violence and murder in a way that does not frighten children, but helps them understand the powerful emotion of anger and its potential dangers. I wanted to help children know Cain not as the personification of evil with whom they could not possibly identify, but as a human being who let his dark side gain control and did a terrible deed.

RABBI SANDY EISENBERG SASSO's latest book is *Cain and Abel–Finding the Fruits* of Peace (Jewish Lights). She lives in Indianapolis and is editor of *Urban Tapestry–Indianapolis Stories.*

No Brainwashing

YEHUDIT KAFRI If I were writing about this now for children, I would first of all tell the truth, but avoid heightening it too sensationally the way the media does for adults. I would try to raise the point of view of the other, the one who attacks us and kills us, to clarify a little, to myself and the young reader, what could motivate someone who attacks us to do these terrible deeds. To check if our side was not, God forbid, committing similar acts. In short, I would not be satisfied with one narrative in which there are only the good (us) and the bad (them.) I would emphasize universal values that apply to all people. I would write with imagination and playfully, and never as brainwashing.

YEHUDIT KAFRI, born on Kibbutz Ein HaHoresh in 1935, has written 15 books, eight of them poetry, and has worked as a translator and book editor.

Heroines Overcome Their Demons

GAIL CARSON LEVINE I'm usually a happy-ending writer, and I'll probably go on being one. My worlds have troubles and villains, but I control the balance, so that my heroine stands a chance of overcoming her demons. However, the danger for me is that as our real world becomes more grim, my imagined worlds and my happy endings may no longer feel honest.

Since the terrorist attacks, I find myself thinking about things I'd like to put into a story, such as the terrible effects of religion and nationalism on human history. I'm hoping to take them on, delicately avoiding didacticism.

GAIL CARSON LEVINE lives in New York's Hudson Valley and is the author of *Ella Enchanted, Dave at Night* and many other books.

Children: Stronger Than We Think

SHIRA GEFFEN In our chaotic world of violent and brutal changes children need stories that will awaken in them such notions as fear and sadness. These emotions offer a catharsis that children cannot find in happiness. Children are a lot stronger than we tend to think and they are able to deal with the many faces of the human experience.

SHIRA GEFFEN was born and lives in Tel Aviv. She is a children's writer, playwright and theater director. Her latest book is *A Heart-Shaped Leaf* (Am Oved).

Bad News From the Start

ELLEN HANDLER SPITZ From her initial gestation in the womb to her emergence into a widening orbit—a world of air, sound, light, concrete and abstract objects and the presence of other living creatures—a human child is (despite our myths and idealizations to the contrary) unsafe. No infant grows unscathed. Even when lovingly parented, a child is imperfectly responded to. She experiences states of ill health and deficiencies of gratification. We do not need to inform children of the existence of pain, loss, fear, unpredictability, disappointment, failure, and death. The world's bad news is there from the start

I would say we should acknowledge this, but at the same time boldly defy it, and take as our primary task that of endowing our children with a deep and abiding reverence for life. This represents a profoundly Jewish interpretation and one that comes from the core of my own life experience. In the wake of each fresh loss, we praise and affirm life. When we look for ways to honor our departed, what do we do? We give their names to our newly born babies. When we raise our glasses in joy to celebrate together, we exclaim: "L'chaim!" Because for us, after all, bad news is an old, old story. Yet, despite this, we know and passionately believe that life is good. This is the message we must give our children. That trust and hope are real, even when they seem, time and again, to elude us.

What matters then is not how we tell children that (and why) groups of people hate one another, make war, behave violently, and so on. Children already know this. They feel it. They observe it in countless forms: at home and in the family, on the street, in their cultural lives, in their peer groups, in the world of animals. I would give them books and plays and songs and stories that celebrate the variegated nature of life and I would laugh with them and hold them and listen carefully to them. And then, when the bad news comes—which it will—I would take them into my arms, if I were able to, and cry.

ELLEN HANDLER SPITZ is Professor of Visual Arts at the University of Maryland, Baltimore; and author most recently of *Inside Picture Books* (Yale Univ. Press).

Every Child Imagines Orphanhood

GAIL HAREVEN The great success of *Harry Potter* I attribute, among other things, to the fact that this series goes back to the principles of children's literature of an earlier era, portraying orphanhood –every child imagines this sometimes—adventure and a struggle with evil.

Here is a true story. About two years ago an Israeli child was kidnapped in Russia. In an effort to collect a ransom, the kidnappers shackled him in a dark pit, and after a few months cut off his finger and sent it to the boy's father. The boy was freed in the end, in terrible condition, as would be expected. When asked in the hospital in Moscow, by the children of the Israeli consulate, what book to bring him to read, he asked—to the surprise of those who don't understand what children's literature is—to read something from the "Chills" series of Israeli thrillers. He was lucky there was no educator type in the area, and he held that "Chills" book in his bandaged hand all the way back on the flight to Israel.

GAIL HAREVEN was born and lives in Jerusalem. She has written books for children and adults as well as plays. She writes on politics and feminism and is a columnist for Maariv and The Jerusalem Report.

Kaddish as Magical Incantation

SUSIE MORGENSTERN The worst news is that nobody is going to get out of this world alive, but I don't like to advertise that. My own grandchildren are very conscious of death. Noam, at four, told me "You see, Bubie, life is so great and so wonderful, and that's why I don't want to die, because when I die I won't be alive anymore for all this." I like to emphasize how great and wonderful life is so that children want to *live*. I think we can tell children anything, we just have to hold their hands when we do it.

What in the Jewish tradition shapes my thinking on these things? For one thing: *Kaddish*. Saying this mumble jumble formula whose words we're better off not understanding is like a magic incantation that gives strength and pushes out the tears. I go to our little Conservative shul in Nice and love to sing heartily with the community, but when I look at the words about God resuscitating the dead and healing the sick, I feel that I am in fairyland with the elves and gnomes. Mostly I remember my grandmother saying "*Toyt iz toyt*" (Dead is dead!) and believing her more than I believe the *siddur*.

SUSIE MORGENSTERN was born in Newark and became a French writer through the accident of falling in love in Jerusalem with a frog prince. She was the first French nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for the body of her work.

Cry for Someone Else

ESTHER HAUTZIG How do books tell the world's bad news to children? The answer that comes first to my mind is "inadvertently!" While writing *The Endless Steppe*, I never thought of it as bad news. It was a personal story of our hardships during World War II and of our survival against heavy odds. I did not try to frame reality when I began writing about living for nearly six years in Siberia. I shared our sadness and pain, but hope was always there, too.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher once said: "It's so much easier to cry over someone else's troubles." When I first heard this I was reminded of weeping over *Little Dorrit* and *Dombey and Son*, by Charles Dickens. (Russian translations were part of the tiny library on the steppe!) Eva Dombey's unhappiness in the midst of wealth, and Dorrit's misery in a London poorhouse resonated for me more than a story about a poor and hungry girl in Siberia might have. I seldom cried over our own troubles; crying over Eva and Dorrit must have relieved some of my tension. Who'd ever think that these 19th century novels would be helpful in my situation? By that same token, who can know what may help readers of today?

A boy wrote to me from Oregon in 1994: "I wanted to cry when I read your book. But we read it in class so I did not cry…It seems weird that people like to read about other people's tragedies. I guess it teaches them something."

And often it brings unexpected solace, healing, and hope.

ESTHER RUDOMIN HAUTZIG, who lives in New York, was born in Vilna. She has written over 20 books; most recently *A Picture of Grandmother* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2002).

History Helps

KAREN WINNICK The essential is *hope*. There are many trying situations that we can struggle through if we have hope that things can perhaps get better. The process of writing is in itself a struggle to arrive at this human understanding. It is almost a metaphor for dealing with the difficulties we face in life.

I enjoy writing stories about history because it is a way to arrive at some basic human truths. Showing, through stories, that things that happened long ago are not so different from events of today is a way of saying that the lessons of history can help us to make better choices. I think it was the Australian author Mem Fox who said that "writing a picture book is like writing 'War and Peace' in haiku."

KAREN B.WINNICK is the author and illustrator of the historical picture book *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers* and most recently *Barn Sneeze*.

Struggles of Underdogs

SONYA SONES When writing for teens, I always try to speak in a voice that's a hundred percent honest. Sometimes embarrassingly honest.We can hide from the pain in our lives (and in the world) and try to pretend it isn't there, but as Robert Frost said, "The only way round is through." We've got to go through it to get to the other side of it. So it seems to me that now, more than ever, kids need to hear the truth.

Stories have a lot of power. Teens who've read *Stop Pretending*, which is about what happened when I was thirteen years old and my older sister had a nervous breakdown, tell me that my book has made them more compassionate towards people with mental illness. And the ones who've read *What My Mother Doesn't Know*, which is about a fourteen-year-old girl who falls in love with a homely guy, tell me that reading my book made them realize that they shouldn't worry so much about what their friends think—that they should just follow their hearts. The reactions have shown me, first hand, the amazing capacity that books have to affect change.

I think being a Jew shapes my thinking on everything. Both these books are about the struggle of the underdog, of the persecuted, to fit in. And this, of course, has been the struggle of Jews throughout history.

SONYA SONES is an award-winning poet who writes novels-in-verse for young adults.

Transmitting Determination

DORIT ORGAD Our Jewish past is a deep pit covered with fragile wrapping, and if once our goal was to deny the existence of this pit, and to hide its terribleness from young readers, today this tendency is reversed. In my book *The Heart That Sought and the Heart That Found*, (Winner of the Yad Vashem Prize, 2001), I describe a high school student who goes to Europe on her summer vacation to places where a relative had fought the Germans as a partisan in World War II, and she returns a completely different person. From a lighthearted girl she became aware of the history of her family and her people, and the determination of the partisan relative is passed along to her.

In my books *Friendship Tested* and *The Hour of the Test* I bring meetings between Jews and Arabs, while noting the problems and the dangers that are a part of these engagements. The personal acquaintance, the information, the confrontation, allow readers (11 and over) to crystalize their own thinking and attitudes, and hopefully prevent confusion and fear.

DORIT ORGAD was born in Germany and came to Israel as a child. She has a doctorate in Jewish philosophy and has written dozens of books.

WHAT'S VALUABLE ABOUT A BOOK FULL OF PAIN OR SADNESS?

Hope After the Holocaust

RUTH MINSKY SENDER My Yiddish name is Riva. I was born in Lodz, Poland. I was thirteen years old when the Nazis invaded Poland and filled my life with pain and horrors. I lost my mother, my three younger brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, teachers and friends. I survived, and share my past with young people through my books—*The Cage, To Life, The Holocaust Lady*—and by speaking in schools. The kids learn about pain and horror and about devotion amidst degradation and about holding on to hope when it was easier to give up. I pass on my mother's legacy: As long as there is life there is hope.

I hear often: I could not survive what you did survive, having your mother torn away from you, becoming the legal guardian, at age 16, of your little brothers. I answer, we do not know how much strength we have until put to the test. Heroes or cowards are not born that way; they are created by circumstances. The kids tell me that when they ask about the Holocaust they are always told "it was terrible." I take them by the hand and take them with me through the journey of hate, pain, survival, hope.

I had given a presentation in a school one day and as I was leaving a boy stopped me and asked. How old were you when all *that* happened. I looked at him and said, thirteen.

He turned pale and said, I am thirteen and he hugged me.

A young girl sent me an e-mail telling me that she had cancer and what helped her endure the pain and hold on was reading *The Cage* many times and the saying*; As long as there is life there is hope.* She will always hold on to hope. I do too.

I feel that by sharing personal experiences of pain and endurance we can teach young people to hold on to hope and learn from the past. ■

RUTH MINSKY SENDER, born 1926 in Lodz, Poland, came to the USA in 1950. She is a retired principal of a Jewish Sunday school. *Remember Your Name, My Friend*, poems she wrote in Yiddish in the concentration camps and translated into English is still unpublished.

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Transforming Sacred Texts

Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts
edited by Ora Wiskind Elper and Susan Handelman, Urim Publications, $29.95

Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament
edited by Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer, Houghton Mifflin, $40.00

Getting to **know** those **"unnamed women"** in the **Bible.**

Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts is a compilation of 23 essays, most written by Orthodox female teachers living in Jerusalem, who wear both their text scholarship and open-mindedness with a rare, disarming humility. The authors are grounded in their religious community, and, by extension, in their community's texts and seriousness of moral purpose.

The methodology underlying these essays is the quiet and rhythmic patience of logic. These women's self-fabric is emotionally integrated with fabric of their "group-self," and they consequently write as Earths revolving around a Sun.

One cluster of essays in *Torah of the Mothers* is about teachers whom the authors have learned with, the student/teacher relationship being something that these women prize. Joy Rochwarger describes Nechama Leibowitz, a brilliant and adored teacher, buying her a Lotto card during one of their weekly Friday morning walks in Jerusalem, and her private, text-informed process, when Leibowitz dies, of weighing whether or not she is entitled to tear *keriyah* [to rip her clothes] as a sign of mourning. "Although my grief was overwhelming," Rochwarger writes, "I was not an immediate relative." The equanimity of this kind of statement, rising like a mist off a distant mountain, is the prevalent tone here…and it is quite different, of course, from what those of us more steeped in the secular world are accustomed to.

And in yet another fine essay Gilla Ratzersdorfer Rosen discusses the lifelong reverberations that were set in motion for her at age 15, when her parents allowed her to accompany them to one of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's famed public lectures in memory of his wife. Soloveitchik discussed the Talmudic text Kiddushin 30b that evening, writes Rosen, and his "distinctions became crucial [to] my ability to internalize his ideas and to use them creatively in my own relationship to God."

"I did not sit for years in the Rav's *shiur* (his daily Talmud class)," she explains, "nor hear him teach the weekly Torah portion every Saturday night, nor care for him in his old age. I do not claim to have 'known the Rav.' I know only that he taught me things when I needed to learn them, that he bridged for me the intellectual and the emotional, the world of words and the world of being."

Finally, in a third essay about a teacher, Yardena Cope-Yossef reprints letters that she received, over the years, from Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. In one (that she received when she was 16) Kaplan writes, "I would like to thank you for helping me find a theme for my *devar Torah* after *Minchah* on *Shabbos*." Years later, Cope-Yossef writes, she realized that the reciprocity Kaplan exhibited towards his students was one of "the features that characterized his greatness." She connects this idea with a beautiful passage from Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav that explains the importance, for a student, of physically looking into a teacher's face, even if one must travel a long way to do so.

The editors, Elper and Handelman, choose to undergird their understanding of what *Torah of the Mothers* is through something shared by Rochwarger's Rav:

"I learned from my mother that Judaism expresses itself…in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to *mitzvot*. I learned from her the most important thing in life—to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His [sic] hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soul-less being, dry and insensitive."

The book also includes essays entitled "Exodus and the Feminine," "The Voice in the Shofar: A Defense of Deborah," and "Physical Infertility and Spiritual Fecundity," among others.

Next, a truly groundbreaking volume in the study of Bible, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, comprised of over 800 scholarly entries (almost all written by female academics), cumulatively gives

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every single woman in the Bible—named and unnamed—her long-awaited due.

Of three sections in this dictionary, the first is devoted to "named women"—Abigail, Jezebel, seven different Marys, Keren-happuch, et cetera. It is a section that is, of course, relatively short. But the "unnamed women" section is humungous, and highly entertaining. We have entries for, say, "Woman Who Mutilates a Man's Genitals" [Deut. 25:11-12], "Daughters as Perfumers, Cooks, and Bakers" [1 Samuel 8:13], "Prostitutes Washing in Ahab's Blood [1 Kings 22:38]," and "Two Mothers Who Agree to Eat Their Sons [2 Kings 6:26-33]." There are also: "Widow Whose Oil is Multiplied," "Wives of Huppim and Shuppim," and "Women of Rehoboam (Eighteen Wives, Sixty Concubines, and Sixty Daughters.)"

Did we mention "Girl," "Woman Who Is a Trap," "Women Who Grind," and "Women Looking Through Windows?" Or "God as a Woman in Labor," "Raped Women and Virgins," "Girl Who Loves Ornaments," "Woman Bent Over for Eighteen Years," and "Woman with a Twelve-Year Hemorrhage?" How about "Trembling Women?" The list is astonishing.

The final third of *Women in Scripture* covers female deities and personifications (like Princess Jerusalem, Great Whore, Mistress Babylon, Lilith, Woman Wisdom), and is also thrilling.

It makes a Jewish woman tingle to see how we—book by book, year by year, decade by decade—continue, devotedly and impressively, to come of intellectual, spiritual and emotional age.

—LILITH STAFF

The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day
by Francine Klagsbrun, Harmony Books, $24.00

When I speak with women's groups about their relatively recent empowerment to participate in Jewish ritual, I often pose the question: who lights the Shabbat candles in your home? If you would like to lead services and read from the Torah, would you be willing to share the mitzvah of *benching licht* with a man? Some agree that would be fair, but many others resist relinquishing what has been one of the few mitzvot specifically incumbent on women.

The Ten Commandments are, of course, gender neutral. But it is the fourth commandment, remembering/observing the Sabbath, that has always enjoyed special resonance for women. Many of us hold in our hearts the memory of a mother or grandmother standing in prayer before the Shabbat candles, hands moving to draw in the holy light. The images of the Sabbath itself, as queen and as bride, are authentically female.

Lilith readers will be particularly interested in this new book on the Sabbath by Jewish feminist pioneer Francine Klagsbrun. Not surprisingly for this author of the useful resource *Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living*, Klagsbrun's familiarity with Jewish sources is impressive; she makes traditional texts on Shabbat accessible. Even Jewishly sophisticated readers will find new material here, drawn not just from Biblical and rabbinic literature, but also from later Jewish and secular texts along with insights from archeology, philosophy, and history.

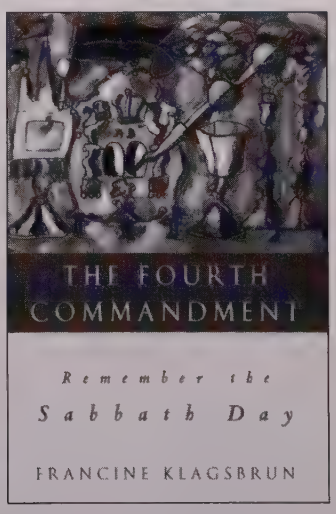
Klagsbrun provides a useful introduction to Shabbat, as well as to wider Jewish tradition. Want to understand how Jewish law develops—from Torah, to the rabbis, through the medieval codifiers, to our own day? Turn to the chapter on "Labor and Laws." Want the basics of Kabbalah? Try the chapter "Women at the Center." Intrigued by the role of Shabbat during the Inquisition? Look at the chapter entitled "The Sabbath Jew and the Sabbath Gentile," in which Klagsbrun illustrates how Shabbat home observance by crypto-Jewish women served simultaneously to place the observer and her family at risk, and to perpetuate Judaism itself.

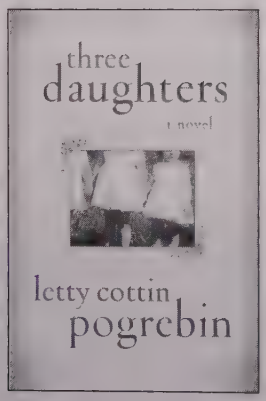
The book begins and ends, as does Shabbat itself, with the symbol of light. In between, Klagsbrun seamlessly weaves together her sources, interspersing personal family memories. She writes with feminist sensibility and rigorous intellectual honesty, as when she confronts sexism by the sages. She wrestles with the kabbalists' imagery of the Shekhinah as passive and subsidiary to male images of God. She notes that some of the ancient rabbis view women's responsibility for lighting candles as a form of expiation for Eve's sin of removing God's original creation of light from the world.

More like a tone poem on the law and lore of Shabbat than a "how-to" manual, the book is a useful resource for teachers and adult students, as well as for personal enrichment. I plan to assign it to those studying for conversion, as well as to adult bat mitzvah students, and to recommend it as a good read for Shabbat afternoon.

—RABBI AVIS D. MILLER

Would you be **willing** to share the **mitzvah** of **lighting candles** with a **man**?





Our Reviewers:

RABBI SUE LEVI ELWELL serves as the Director of the UAHC Pennsylvania Council. With Rebecca Alpert and Shirley Idelson, she edited *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation* (Rutgers University Press).

RABBI AVIS D. MILLER is Rabbi of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC. Her congregation has recently published a collection of her sermons, entitled *On Wings of Hope: Reflections on the High Holy Days.*

Queer Jews

edited by David Shneer and Caryn Aviv,
Routledge, $19.95

Queer Jews welcomes us into the worlds and the lives of Jews who identify as queer: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. These twenty-one essays—by Hebrew school teachers, principals, rabbis, Jews in the pews and those who define themselves as secular—challenge readers to wrestle not only with sexual diversity, but also with gender identity.

Jewish culture and behavior are often assumed to be based on a rigid binary division of men and women. So proposing a spectrum of gender identification can be deeply unsettling, if not profoundly threatening. This provocative collection asks: how does the development of a vibrant queer Jewish culture strengthen, challenge and transform mainstream Jewish culture? How can queer Jews be authentic and visible while participating fully in the Jewish worlds we are transforming?

In "Whose side are you on? Transgender at the Western Wall," TJ Michels and Ali Cannon share their painful attempts to join other spiritual seekers at this site that has become a potent symbol for the tragic consequences of parochial interpretations of Jewish history and texts. Michels' and Cannon's words illustrate the tension that Joanne Cohen articulates in her essay, "Remembering the Stranger": "To affirm proud queer and Jewish marginal identities in an historical and cultural context of genocide, anti-Semitism, homophobia and anti-religious secularism requires that we repeatedly deal with internal and external moments of conflict, oppression, doubt, resistance, and self-loathing."

Queer Jews points the way to future studies. Marla Brettschneider's excellent essay on the challenges of lesbian adoption could set the tone and direction of further work on the creation and nurturing of queer Jewish families; editor David Shneer's essay "Queering the Curriculum" raises questions that should concern all Jewish educators. The contributors to this bold collection write with clarity, a healthy measure of chutzpah, and hope that their words will establish a permanent place of recognition and honor for the thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning Jews who gather at family and communal tables across our Jewish world.

—RABBI SUE LEVI ELWELL

Three Daughters

Letty Cottin Pogrebin
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25

The amazing thing about this engaging debut novel by feminist organizer, Ms magazine co-founder, spokesperson for progressive Jewish causes and author of the popular autobiography *Deborah Golda and Me* is that it reads as if written for us. The "us" in this case being Jewish feminists. The book's plot lines rework as fiction many incidents plumbed in Pogrebin's autobiography and some of her other writing: her mother's early death, her father's distance, the earth-shattering destabilization of having family secrets revealed to her without preparation, an ongoing struggle with Judaism. Her feminist political roots show too—at least one of the characters could be living in a *roman à cléf* about the women's movement. But paradoxically, the novel's very familiarity—of plots and setting and even of character—is one of its delights. Pogrebin has given us an authentic Jewish feminist novel without a glossary, with the reassuring opinion that we need none. She assumes that her ideal readers will get it all: the names she drops—whether of feminist causes and leaders or of well-known-only-in-certain circles Jewish men like Leibl (sic) Fein and Ismar Schorsch—the political rallies, the Yiddish phrases and Talmudic aphorisms.

The three women of the title are half sisters, each from a different coupling. The only parental character still around is the aging rabbi who fathered two of them. He is adored by the youngest daughter, respected by his stepdaughter (Rachel, the suburbanite who studies Judaism seriously even as she creates a perfect castle for her family and runs her needlepoint business on the side) and reviled by the biological child he abandoned when she was in her early teens. No sense in giving away the twists and turns here. You just need to know that from the novel's opening scene (the youngest, Shoshanna Safer, a consultant on how to be organized, loses all the pages out of her filofax on the Henry Hudson Parkway) to the final ones in a darkened synagogue classroom (sister Leah, the fearless feminist ideologue, learns her truths), you'll be embedded in the history both of a complex family *and* of the women's movement. Sit still and feel the reverberations on this sympathetic trio.

—SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

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New & Noteworthy

This debut novel from Lilith Fiction Editor Yona Zeldis McDonough sets its five main characters against the backdrop of the New York City Ballet. ***The Four Temperaments*** (Doubleday, $23.95) deals with men and women who squelch dreams and ignite new passions on a diet of love and disappointment. Oscar Kornblatt, married, middle-aged first violinist with the New York City Ballet orchestra, falls in love with a spirited and gifted young dancer with the company. Oscar, a failed "brilliant artist" who has instead become a talented musician and breadwinner, is more father than lover to Ginny Valentine. Oscar's wife Ruth, who put her own musical career on permanent hold, spends her days seeking out perfect ingredients for shabbos meals, caring for crack babies and nursing home residents, and wondering what she can do to keep her family connected. Though she's aware of Oscar's infatuation with "that girl," Ruth firmly believes that "there may have been few surprises in married love, but there was great tenderness, one of the rewards of long intimacy." She finds herself inviting Ginny for Thanksgiving, a potential *shiddukh* for her youngest son. Instead, Ruth catches her oldest, Gabriel, married to a beautiful obsessive-compulsive ice queen, embracing Ginny in the guest room.

Not all the relationships last until the end of the book, although McDonough's observant narrative allows the reader to dissect each character's romantic motivations, from the rise in status that marriage brings to the desire to return to the youthful passions of an uncomplicated tryst. While the illegitimate couplings are tainted by guilt, the socially sanctioned ones are fettered with secrets, lies, and unclear intentions. Truth's healing power does eventually enter the tale, and readers learn that each of the Four Temperaments brought to the stage by Balanchine—Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic and Phlegmatic—is part of the mosaic needed to ensure that love and passion endure the wanderings of the heart.

—YAEL FLUSBERG

In 1995, a bilateral prophylactic mastectomy (having both healthy breasts removed) was psychologist Janet Reibstein's choice for survival. ***Staying Alive*** (Bloomsbury, $24.95) is Reibstein's family memoir, told as both a personal journey and a history of current breast-cancer knowledge, treatments and women's attitudes. In this book we learn how and why she arrived at her dramatic decision.

They were three close, loving sisters—Mary, Fannie and Regina Smith, born between 1912 and 1920—daughters of Jewish immigrant parents. Tragically, all three were diagnosed with breast cancer: Fannie ("sharp-witted, steady, and puzzlingly frail") at 32, Regina ("ambitious, brainy") at 43, and Mary (the "sweet, careless one") at 55. All three eventually succumbed to the disease.

Janet, Regina's daughter, tells of the impact of the disease on the sisters' personalities, their sibling relationships, their marriages, their children, and—in Regina's case—professional life. The story is heart-wrenchingly detailed. At its

"Please Don't Feed the Models!"

very essence, however, this cautionary account is a chronicle of an intense relationship between mother and daughter, bound by love and a genetic "curse."

In the sisters' era, women's breasts were perceived for the most part by women and men as sexy, aesthetic and pleasurable. Breast cancer was thought to be an older women's disease, and one only whispered about. Mammograms were unheard of, radical mastectomies were the norm (and had been since the late 19th century) and there was no knowledge of breast-cancer-causing mutated genes.

After her cousin Joyce was diagnosed in her late 40's, when Janet herself was 48, Janet's breasts became, in her own mind, her "enemies." After investigating the possibility of preventive mastectomies for over 20 years, her decision was fortuitous; when she thought she was having elective, preventive surgery, she did in fact have carcinoma-in-situ. *Her* breast cancer story is one of hope, survival and taking charge.

As an almost 11-year breast cancer survivor myself (we all seem to remember the exact dates we were diagnosed), with a breast cancer family history, and as an informed medical consumer and advocate, I have yet to confront the genetic predisposition possibility. I'd always thought that, since I was childless with no familial legacy, I didn't need to know my genetic status. This book makes me rethink my options. —ANN JACKOWITZ

If you could use a little chicken soup for the feminist soul, check out ***That Takes Ovaries!*** (edited by Rivka Solomon, Three Rivers Press, $13.00). This is a collection of anecdotes written by women who explore and assert their feminine strength. Ranging from cute to inspiring, these stories showcase women who are full of courage, rebelliousness, and self-confidence.

In "Diary of an Urban Guerrilla," Kathy Bruin recounts her frustration and disgust at the depiction of women in the media. She creates "About-Face: a San Francisco group dedicated to combating negative images of women." The group posters towns with images that challenge accepted portrayals of women; one of the posters depicts women in a circus cage, with the caption "Please Don't Feed the Models." Bruin describes the rush she felt as she took her stand against sexism, joined by other activists who shared her convictions.

My personal favorite tale in this compilation is "Synagogue Revolt" by Loolwa Khazzoom. Here, a fourteen-year-old girl fights for the preservation of her Iraqi-Jewish religious heritage, despite being "just a girl." She manages to unite the women and "passive men" in her synagogue by loudly opposing the established leader of prayer and leading the congregants in traditional Iraqi-Jewish songs. Her efforts result in a full-blown outburst and recognition of tensions that had been stirring within her community.

Solomon devotes 12 pages of instruction on how to set up *That Takes Ovaries!* gatherings, at which, she hopes, participants will tell their own stories and subsequently buy a copy of her book. The suggestion is, of course, a brazen *That Takes Ovaries!* act in and of itself.

—KAREN KRANSON

The Volcano Sequence (University of Pittsburgh Press, $12.95) is Alicia Ostriker's tenth volume of poems. Ostriker, a former Lilith poetry editor, gives a vivid portrait of a woman at a turning point in her life, a narrator whose voice is full of contradiction. She is lucid and erratic, forthcoming and withdrawn, righteous and vulnerable, rebellious and tame. We catch her in the midst of a dialogue with a being who is just as complex and elusive, addressed as "you paradigm paradox / you absent presence…you good evil." In language by turns sparse, lyric, erotic, and conversational, Ostriker's narrator asks this being urgent questions about life and purpose, separation and attachment, pain and rebirth.

In addition to searching for answers to these questions, Ostriker's heroine is trying to understand this Protean being, whose presence (and absence) haunts her. The "you" addressed throughout the book wavers from the Old Testament God, a father-figure both protective and destructive, to Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of God who symbolizes struggling women throughout the world and their instincts for survival, to the speaker's mother. This is a mother who, she feels, betrayed and abandoned her, whose care and attention she longs for.

By the end of the book, we feel the narrator coming into her voice completely unhindered, with the freedom to say to her mother, and to the world, "I am sixty-two/at last able to speak the sentence / I love you."

—WENDY WISNER

A "fictional autobiography" makes about as much sense as a "universalized exception." Yet in ***Ethel: The Fictional Autobiography*** (Syracuse University Press, $24.95), Tema Nason's first novel, both phrases apply. Nason crafts a fictional first-person narrative of the last months of the life of Ethel Rosenberg, executed in 1953 alongside her husband Julius for allegedly passing the secret of the atomic bomb to the Soviets. Concerned less with Ethel's actual innocence or guilt than with hearing her personal voice, this novel finds its power in fleshing out a historical figure who is often reduced to a political figurehead.

Nason's Ethel sits alone in her jail cell, contemplating life as she awaits her preordained death. Since every reader can be assumed to know the outcome of the trial, Nason focuses instead on Ethel's thoughts. Ethel's flashbacks are unexpected: instead of focusing on the Communist movement or the illustration of the bomb around which her trial revolved, they illuminate her relationships with her mother, her children, her personal aspirations. Her conflicts are Everywoman's conflicts: between family and job, conventions and dreams. Nason makes Ethel universal even as she emphasizes the exceptional nature of her situation.

Ethel dreams as everyone dreams: "Always with new situations…my mind would go on like that; this was going to change my life, this, this was it, this new thing…like Cinderella at the ball, and this would turn my life, now lived in suspension, into the Real Thing." She aspires to theatrical stardom, but finds herself turning instead to sweat shops and then picket lines. Ethel, who dies from her unswaying assertion of her innocence, arrives at the conclusion that without honesty and compassion, human interactions are no more than a farce.

ROBERT BERKOVITZ

Although Nason's prose is stilted at times, the relationships she creates between Ethel and other characters—her sons, Michael and Robert, her husband Julius, her mother and her brother—are rich and believable. Nason doesn't claim to recreate a historical moment; instead she brings the past vividly to the present.

—MARGOT KAMINSKI

The Book of Splendor (by Frances Sherwood, W.W. Norton and Co., $25.95) lives up to its title, which is a translation of the word *Zohar*, a central text in the body of Jewish mystical literature. Set in early seventeenth-century Prague, this novel interweaves the lives of Rochel, a Jewish seamstress trapped in a passionless marriage, a mad emperor obsessed with immortality, a rabbi who creates a *golem* in order to protect the Jews from Christian attacks, and a host of other unusual characters. Rochel and the *golem* identify with each others' social limitations—she as a woman in a patriarchal society and he as a seemingly subhuman giant in a world of men—and their bond leads to an affair with disastrous consequences. The rabbi, along with a few British alchemists, is forced to help the emperor discover the secret of immortality.

Rich with historical detail, *The Book of Splendor* is a vivid fantasy with Faustian overtones that explores the extents and limits of human creative power. It is an out-of-the-ordinary, dreamlike tale that is beautifully rendered and imaginatively rooted in the Jewish mystical tradition and other sources of indigenous European fable and folklore.

—HILA RATZABI

I read ***Sacred Voices: Essential Women's Wisdom Through the Ages***, edited by Mary Ford-Grabowsky (Harper Collins, $24,95), with a mixture of resistance and curiosity. I opened the book to its publicity blurbs, and discovered that half of them were from men! The foreword, by Andrew Harvey, expresses his longing to honor the divine feminine as something sacred that has been missing for too long. True enough. The editor's introduction reminds us that for thousands of years, it has been men who wrote history as we know it—religious doctrines, governmental regulations, societal rules. Ford-Grabowsky is determined to bring forth "the sacred voice of the feminine."

The scope of the women included here is impressive; so is the span of time their lives cover. We have inspirational writings by or about 172 women: goddesses, queens, priestesses, rabbis, artists,

Buddhist monks, nuns, nurses, doctors and other contemporary women, each one with her own sense of courage about speaking out and sharing a piece of wisdom. The reader's journey begins in the second or third millennium BCE, reading about Inanna, the Great Mother Goddess in Mesopotamia. From there to Egypt, where we meet the ancient queen Hashepsowe, to India to meet Patacara, who followed her heart, lost her family and became a member of the first Buddhist community of women. Sufism's revered and beloved poet-saint of Persia, Rabia Al-Adawiyya, (717-801), "needed nothing because she had everything," says her twelfth-century biographer. And then there's Angela of Foligno from Italy, in the thirteenth century, who didn't have any spiritual interest at all prior to a mystical experience at 40. Judaism is represented by, among others, Tirza Firestone, a rabbi living in Boulder, Colorado, reclaiming her sense of spirituality in Judaism. She says, "I believe that this is what God most wants of us: to discover and offer our true selves."

This book—with its candor and wisdom from women of vastly different backgrounds, eras, religions and cultures—can be a useful step on the path "to reclaim wholeness, integrity," as Rachel Naomi Remen puts it. (She's Jewish and a medical doctor and author living in New York.) Reading this book I heard not only my own inner voice, but also the values we, as women, hold to be sacred, including joy and pure celebration of life. ■

—SHELLEY SILVER WHIZIN

YAEL FLUSBERG is a writer and co-founder of Sol & Soul, an arts and social change organization based in Washington, D.C.

ANN JACKOWITZ is Executive Director of the Samuel Waxman Cancer Research Foundation in New York City.

KAREN KRANSON recently graduated from N.Y.U. with a degree in Religious Studies.

WENDY WISNER's poetry has appeared in *Sojourner*. She has an MFA from Hunter College and leads the Poets' Circle at Makor.

SHELLEY S. WHIZIN lives in California; among her many Jewish involvements, she serves on the board of the Institute for Contemporary Midrash.

Reconstructionist Study Group

We meet to consider God. But first,
introductions all around. Adam,
raised Orthodox, confesses
he ate his first bacon at Harvard
and fell away from religion
in the arms of a Methodist girl.
A Catholic who married a Jew
says she loves the creative tension
between predestination and free will.
I gave up God at eleven—when Mother
fell ill—and prayed to my Ogd instead.

Would God exist if we didn't? And if He
(She) (It) didn't, would we? We are
all scarred by the Holocaust. We doubt
that God spoke to Moses, or cares
what we want, or knows what we haven't said.
The convert probes Love as Meaning;
the therapist says she's a Trekkie;
the Bundist son of a Hasid asks what sort
of Force sends refugee Kurds to starve
in Iraqi mountains, or washes up corpses
like driftwood on beaches in Bangladesh.

Leaving, we pledge to cherish each other,
though we're not very good with names.
Outside, the whole improbable world
smells like wieners on campfires, roasting,
or the chickens my mother charred
when she was too sick to know how to cook.
A warehouse has smoldered all weekend.
Hundreds of tons of burnt butter and rivers
of melted cheese slick Cottage Grove Road
toward Starkweather Creek. I am beyond
disbelief. Ogd hovered over the icebox,
playing chess with our lives and laughing,
in the kitchen where I grew up.

—JUDITH STRASSER

Writers in Conversation:
Letty Cottin Pogrebin & Susan Weidman Schneider

Join *Lilith* magazine editor-in-chief **Susan Weidman Schneider** in a compelling conversation with acclaimed Jewish feminist and author **Letty Cottin Pogrebin**. Pogrebin will read from her first work of fiction, *Three Daughters*, an ambitious story of the lives of three sisters and the web of relationships that entangles them. **Part of Booked: A Lively Series of Literary Conversations**.

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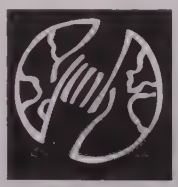

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Mothers and Daughters

Better Don't Talk! A Daughter Discovers her Mother's Hidden Past is a one woman musical drama by Naava Pietka, daughter of a Yiddish actress who became a star in the Vilna Ghetto. The show can be seen at Brandeis University in Boston on October 6 or at other venues to be arranged. *Naava Pietka (617) 332-3039; naavapiatka@hotmail.com*

Forgive your mother? Lisa Delman in her Letters From the Heart contest invites daughters to write letters of forgiveness to their mothers and possibly find healing in the process. "Winning" letters will be awarded prizes and included in a book. Letters due November 30. *www.LettersFromTheHeart Project.com.*

Family History. Research your family on the website of the Genealogy Institute at New York's Center for Jewish History. Useful fact sheets and lists of records available in their collections can be found at *www.cjh.org--click on family history; (212)294-8324; gi@cjh.org*

Rabble Rousing

The Emma Goldman Papers: A National Endowment for the Humanities grant will match all donations to this project, documenting Emma Goldman's extraordinary commitment to women's

rights, freedom of expression and social justice. Two volumes are soon to come out from the University of California Press and a third is planned. *(510)642-4708; emma@uclink.berkeley.edu; http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman.* You can also learn about Goldman's life and Jewish connections, in Lilith's Winter 2001 issue—$6 from Lilith, 250 W. 57th St., #2432, New York, NY 10107.

Feminist-in-Residence. Activists, artists and scholars committed to feminist social change are invited to apply for an opportunity to network with colleagues, reflect, and teach for a month at San Diego State University Women's Studies Department. $5,000 stipend. Apply by October 15 for the spring. *Susan E. Cayleff, cayleff@mail.sdsu.edu; www.rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/wsweb.*

Thirteen million single moms are raising 20 million children under age 18 in the United States. A campaign asks these women and their families and friends to contribute one dollar each towards grants and scholarships to those trying to raise their standard of living and that of their children by continuing their education and advancing their careers. *Raise the Nation, www.raisethenation.org; (866)616-1655*

Celebrations & Passages

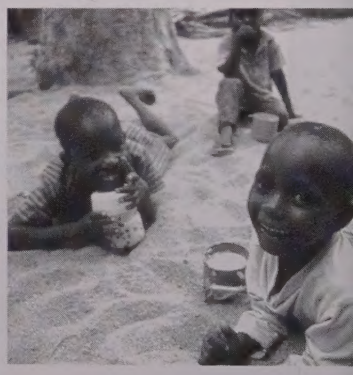
Jewish childbirth preparation classes combine childbirth education with the exploration of Jewish traditions, customs and rituals connected with pregnancy, birth and parenting. *Rabbi Marjorie Slome, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. (212)399-3021; mslome@jbfcs.org*

A little oil goes a long way. Lower a thermostat a couple of degrees. Replace a standard light bulb with a compact fluorescent light bulb. Link your Hanukkah celebrations with energy conservation using ideas posted on the website of Coalition on the Environment in Jewish Life. *www.coejl.org*

Jewish Paganism: For a book, the author is looking for people to interview. email *jen@jenniferhunter.com or call 781-956-3732*

Africa

Over 14 million people—half of them children—are at risk of starvation due to a severe food shortage across Southern Africa. Political instability and three years of drought combined with flooding have compounded the problems in Zambia and Malawi. An Israeli "Food for Work" program, organized by Irit Rabinovitz and Yura Vasserman provides food rations for over 1800 orphan children and families in Mongochi district in Malawi. They have organized the distribution of tons of donated maize meals to people in return for road repairs, and beach and graves cleaning. They report that people are happy to work for the food rather than having to beg for it. They also operate HIV awareness classes and help teach in local schools. Contributions and volunteers are welcome. *Shachar Zahavi (972) 55 679 979; szahavi@hotmail.com*



A film on the Abayudaya. A 3-minute "trailer" gives a taste of a documentary now in production about a Beit Din's conversion of over 300 of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda last February. The producers are trying to fund completion of the film and find venues to air it. *www.divacommunications.com/AbayudayaTrailer_windows.htm* for windows media player and *www.divacommunications.com/AbayudayaTrailer.htm* for a quicktime file.

Healing

A breast cancer hotline and support program created at the Adelphi University School of Social Work has lists of programs throughout New York State and has helpful hints and information for others as well. *800-877-8077; nysbchot@adelphi.edu; www.adelphi.edu/nysbreastcancer*

Tikva—hope is for aliens too. Bernard Kaplan started, through his shul in Staten Island, NY, what has become an interdenominational, you-don't have-to-be-affiliated, self-run, no-fee, Jewish cancer-survivors support group that meets in people's homes. The participants, though they are grateful for the support of others, call themselves *aliens* because they feel so *different*. Learn how you can start a group like this in your community. *bbkap@aol.com*

Finding Hospice Care in your community for someone who is terminally ill is one of many topics covered in *A Helping Hand: The Resource Guide for People with Cancer, 4th edition*, from *Cancer Care, (800)813-4673; infor@cancercare.org; www.cancercare.org*

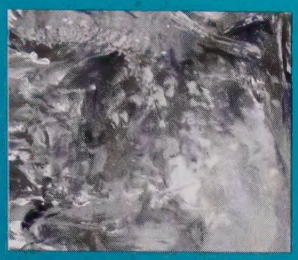
Help Israel

Donate your frequent flyer miles to artisans and store owners in Israel. In an effort to boost the Israeli economy devastated by a lack of tourism, efforts are being made to defray the costs to Israeli merchants of travel to North America to sell and to take orders that are filled when they return to Israel. The coordinators have arranged with Delta and Continental to allow individuals with frequent flyer miles to purchase round trip tickets from Israel in other people's names. Contact: *Meredith Weiss, mw812@aol.com (718) 796-4730.*

One million delicious gourmet kosher chocolate chip cookies, baked by volunteers, are available for sale in one pound gift boxes for $9 each. The Israel Emergency Solidarity Fund and New York restaurant owner Levana Kirschenbaum have teamed up in this effort. Proceeds —estimated at $500,000— will be donated to help the families struck by terror in Israel. To help bake at the JCC of Manhattan call *(646)505-4455*; to order cookies call *(800)672-8411; www.millioncookies.com*

Art

Woman Listening: Painting with the Body by Gila Amsalem, an exhibit in the Antea Gallery, curated by Rita Mendes-Flohr,

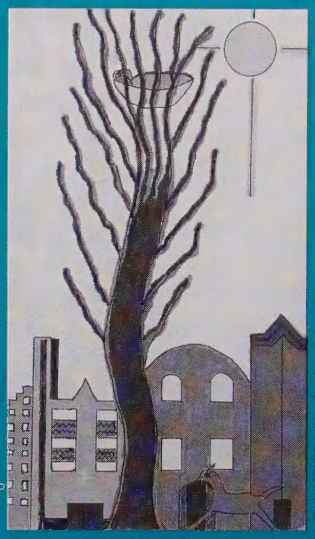


marks the opening of the newly located women's center, Kol Ha-Isha, at 40 King George Street in Jerusalem. Ten greeting cards, two each of five different paintings by Gila Amsalem are $10 plus shipping from Kol Ha-Isha. *Jerusalem (972)2-6222455, kolisha@netvision.net.il*

Two Artists, One Goat. paintings of Frank Stella and Nira Savir exploring the meanings of the Had Gadya folk song of Passover seder fame can be seen September 30 to February 28, 2003 at the Spertus Museum in Chicago, *(312)322-1747; musm@spertus.edu*

Jewish Pioneer Women, 1850-1910. Artist Andrea Kalinowski shows their lives through her multimedia quilts at the Yeshiva University Museum in New York from Nov.–Jan. 5, 2003 then traveling through 2005 at venues in New Mexico, Indianapolis, Houston and St. Louis. A catalog is available. *(505)983-0475; studioajk@aol.com*

Shining Tribe tarot deck paintings by artist Rachel Pollack [featured in Lilith Spring 2002] are available as prints from Art & Soul Gallery, Woodstock NY, *(845)679-0027 or Rachel@RachelPollack.com*



Go & Learn

Literacy improvement, peace education and conflict resolution, governance, and education for people with disabilities. Policy-makers, scholars and practitioners will explore how women have used their education to address these global issues, especially in emerging nations at a cpmferemce November 15-17 in Washington DC *International Symposium, AAUW Educational Foundation, fax 202/463-7169; www.aauw.org/7000/ef/symposium.html*

Holocaust Children/Child Survivors Gatherings: This spring marked the tenth anniversary of the First International Gathering of the Hidden Child in New York. A gathering will take place October 11-14, 2002 in Toronto, contact *Anita Eckstein, (905)770-1319, aekstein@rogers.com; or Marilyn Maeirovitz at (416)635-2883x272, mmaierovitz@ujafed.org.* Another planned for Aug. 31-Sept. 1, 2003, in Washington, will coincide with a Hidden Child Exhibit at the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Hidden Child Foundation (212)490-2525; hidden-child@adl.org*

Mothers of Israel: Why the Rabbis Adopted a Matrilineal Principle by Susan Sorek as well as essays exploring the writing of Leah Goldberg, Shulamith Hareven, Savyon Liebrecht and Yona Wallach appear in Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 2002). *www.women-in-judaism.com*

—compiled by NAOMI DANIS

Anorexia, Friday Nights:

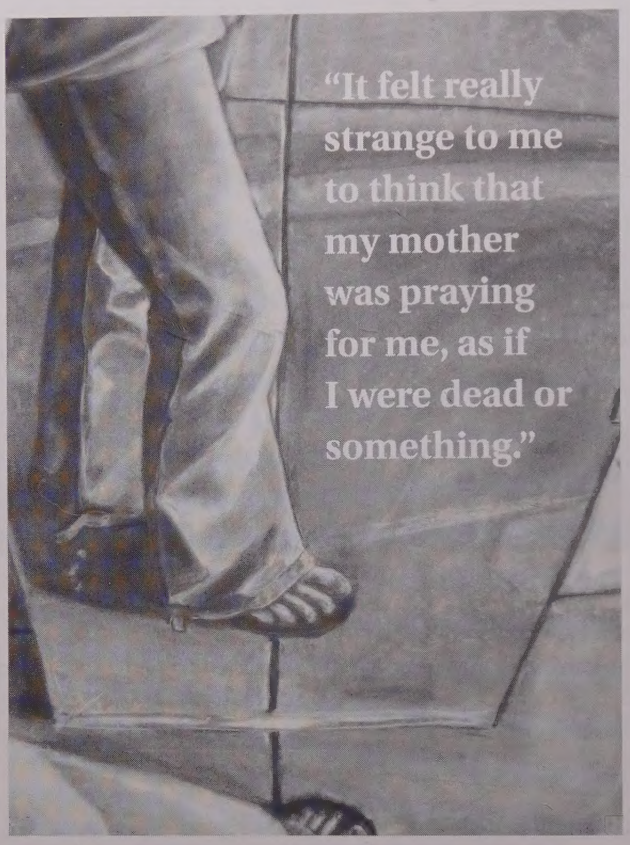
Mom in synagogue, me in the hospital

ILANA KATHERINE KLARMAN

From early May until July 10, 2000, I was in various hospitals being treated for anorexia nervosa.

While I was in treatment I had time to reflect on my 14 years of life as a whole. Surprisingly, my thoughts never turned to religion—I say "surprisingly" because when something's wrong in my mother's life, she right away turns to Judaism for guidance, and I thought I would have been more like her in that respect.

Something was definitely wrong that summer. Her oldest daughter was being hospitalized in New Orleans for a potentially fatal illness. While I was receiving more help than I knew what to do with—a packed schedule of intensive therapy, activities and discussions—Mom was back in Boston feeling helpless.



Friday nights were supposedly "relaxation time" in the hospital. Mom was allegedly relaxing on Friday nights, too, in the only way she knew how, in the only way that made sense under the circumstances: She was going to synagogue. She would arrive there at 5:30 sharp, along with my less-than-enthusiastic Dad and siblings. At the same hour, far away at Depaul Tulane Eating Disorders Clinic, Seton One, we patients were cooking a "challenging meal." Hot dogs, quiche, fettuccine Alfredo, chocolate chip cookies, et cetera. It wasn't fun; it was hard seeing all the fatty ingredients, and then having to eat what we made, because it felt so excessive. Also, I didn't want my mother to think I was eating again, and thus had solved all of my problems.

Because of Mom's new weekly attendance at services, she told me that Temple Israel felt more like a community to her, and "not just a place to go for the High Holidays." At the hospital, I had a new community too, friends whom I kept in touch with for a while. When I got back to Boston, at first I didn't want to go to synagogue, but then I started to like it. I enjoyed the structure of Friday night services; they were calming and soothing in their simplicity. I love routines because they let you know what to expect, plus my family was together. I also felt closer to my mom by sitting there and experiencing what it must have been like for her every Shabbos while I was away. She felt closer to me, too, I think, having me there.

Every day in New Orleans we worked to fight off our eating disorders. Every day back home my mom wore the Star of David necklace that she had once given me, on a gold chain around her neck; she had asked me if she could wear it while I was gone. To me, Mom's wearing the necklace meant she was thinking of me. To her, it meant she was kind of praying, and trying to hold me close. Each week in synagogue, she said the "*Mi Shebeyrach*" blessing for healing, murmuring my name along with everyone else who was murmuring the name of someone frighteningly ill: "Bless those in need of healing with *r'fu-a sh'ley-ma*." I imagined her adding, "I want my Lansky home. Give her power to get well. May the Lord of strength help our family find strength."

It felt really strange to me to think that my mother was praying for me, putting my name in the prayer as if I were dead or something and needed to be brought back to life. When I was seven my brother was born four months early, and I remember Mom praying to God then, too. Having her say the "*Mi Shebeyrach*" for me made me realize that something was incredibly wrong in my life. I don't know if the prayer made God recognize what was going on with Mom, but it definitely made me recognize what was going on with me.

It doesn't really matter to me whether I believe in God or not, but I know it matters to my mother that she believes, so I'm glad she does. What I believe in is my mother. What she believes in is God—and me. If she didn't, this journey would be so much harder. ■

ILANA KATHERINE KLARMAN is a high school junior at Milton Academy. She lives with her family in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

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